

Exposed?

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Summary: Everything is finally perfect. Or so they think... There is someone in the group that they can't trust, but will they find out who it is before it is too late? Will their secret be exposed?

1. Chapter 1

Life was perfect. Finally everything just seemed right.

Lewis was home, continuing his studies at a local college and working with a marine biologist. He felt that this was the best way to get the education he wanted and the time spent working out on a boat and in a lab with a marine biologist was much more educational than time spent in a classroom.

Emma had come home from travelling with her parents. She had plenty of exciting tales to tell from her time spent abroad, including some rather close calls with water. She said that it was much harder to keep our secret when travelling, from shared bathrooms to weeks of rain, it seemed like an impossible task. Somehow she managed, but said she was very glad to finally be home with her fellow mermaids.

Bella and Emma got along great from the second they first met. Rikki and I were worried that their personalities might clash or that perhaps Emma would be jealous of Bella, feeling like we replaced her. Thankfully none of that happened and now we are quite possibly the strongest group of friends there ever was.

Rikki and Zane got back together and , except for an occasional quarrel, are going strong.

Sophie left to attend a college in England and I think we all agree, good riddance!

Will continues to dive simply for fun, not competing in any

competitions. He will often come swimming with us, which Bella very much enjoys. I don't know about Rikki or Emma, but I don't especially trust Will. Something about him seems... fishy.

Bella trusts him completely, but I think she is just blinded by love. Will doesn't seem to like Bella for who she is. In my opinion he just likes her for what she is. He just likes being in on the secret, and finding out all he can about our mermaid powers.

Of course I have hardly any facts to base this on, just my own observations and assumptions.

We were all sitting around a table sipping smoothies at Rikki's cafe, which Zane and Rikki still own together. It really was perfect. I was wedged between Emma and Lewis, Bella was smushed between Emma and Rikki, and Zane was on the other side of Rikki.

Suddenly Zane stood up, followed by Rikki, and they announced that they had to go downtown and sign some papers for the cafe. Then Lewis stood up and said he had a class at the college that he simply couldn't be late for.

"Well I guess it is just us three, right guys?" I said cheerfully.

"Umm... actually I've got to get going." Emma announced.

"Why?" me and Bella said at the same time.

"I have to go pick Elliot up from soccer practice."

I pouted and gave her puppy dog eyes. "Sorry, I have to! I promised Elliot I would be there right at three." She grabbed her bag and waved as she left the cafe.

"Soo... just us two then?" I asked Bella. She grinned and nodded her head. "How about a swim?" she asked. "Sounds great!" I said.

Bella's phone beeped and she pulled it out of her bag. "Oh... sorry Cleo. Looks like we will have to do that swim another time."

"What! Don't tell me you have to leave too!"

"I just got a text from Will. He wants me to pick up his monofin from his house and meet him at the dock. He is way over on the other side of town and it would be closer for me to get it and take it to him so he can do a couple of quick dives."

"Arg. I guess I will come with you."

"Are you sure? You don't have to."

"Yeah I'm sure. I don't have anything else to do."

"Well okay. We could swim there I suppose."

"Yeah! That would be much quicker than walking and I need a swim anyway."

We headed out of the cafe and made sure no one was looking before we

dove into the water and swam off.

We quickly arrived at Will's boat shed and then we hoisted ourselves up onto the dock. I levitated all the water off of us, a trick I had recently learned that came in quite handy, and we had our legs back in seconds. It worked even faster than Rikki evaporating the water off of us and I was actually very proud of it.

We walked right inside the blue unlocked boat shed that served as Will's house.

Bella instantly was looking in some cabinets for whatever it was we were looking for and I was snooping around Will's drawings and shells and stuff. Yes, I know I shouldn't be snooping around other people's things but I was just too curious.

I "accidentally" bumped a yellow folder of loose papers titled simply "Bella" off the messy table. Loose papers flew everywhere. Bella suddenly turned around "Cleo what happened?"

My hands flew up to my face as I pretended to be suprised. "Oh! I'm sorry, I am so clumsy!" I said while acting flustered and shuffling the papers around, not really picking them up.

"Here, let me help you." Bella said, making her way over towards. "No!" I shouted "No, really I got it. It's just a few loose papers, nothing I can't handle. I will just pick them up and put them back on the table! No problem at all, I can handle it myself. You just, you know, go and get t-the stuff, all that dive stuff, fins and what-not, whatever Will needs..." I babbled on about who knows what.

"Uh, yeah okay." Bella said, slightly skeptical. She headed back over to the cabinet and I began to look at what had fallen out of the folder. I gasped at what I saw.

It looked like... well it looked like scientific notes. On Bella. There was remarkably life-like drawings of her. And when I say her I mean her tail. Not even sketches of all of her in mermaid form, just scientific looking drawings of her tail, with labels and arrows scientific notes!

There was entire pages of research he had done on us, it looked like these notes could be about any creature that he was studying. But they weren't! This was about us! It was rather freaky.

"Um Bella... I think you should come have a look at this."

She walked over towards me and crouched down on the ground. "What is it?" she asked.

"This! Look at all this! It's like scientific notes and stuff on you!"

She picked up some papers and glanced through them "Huh." was all she said.

"Huh? That is all you have to say! This is really weird! And creepy! And stalker-ish! His notes refer to you like you are some sort of animal! Did you know he was doing this?"

"Well, no. I will admit it is a bit odd... but it's not like Lewis doesn't do the same thing."

"What?"

"Well you know, Lewis does all kinds of tests and notes and stuff on us, you never thought it was creepy before. Annoying, yes. Creepy, no. How is what Will is doing any different?"

"Lewis is different! He does tests and stuff to help us. What Will is doing is..."

"Very similar. I don't see why you are so freaked out about this. You just want to break me and Will up don't you?"

"What? No Bella I was just looking out for you! This has nothing to do with you and Will being together. Why would I even care about that!"

Bella shook her head "I don't know. I'm sorry I just jumped to conclusions I guess. Wait, what were you even doing looking at this stuff in the first place?"

I froze. What was I doing looking in there..."It just fell off the table..."

"Sure it did." she snapped, suddenly angry again. "I can't believe you, snooping through Will's stuff. And I can take care of myself! I don't need you looking out for me so just leave me alone."

She stood up to leave and was about to walk out when she suddenly turned around "Wait, I'm not leaving. You leave. You have no right to be in here. Out!"

I sighed and stood up. How could I make her see that something was off about Will? I ran out the door and gracefully dove into the water. I sped away to the moon pool for some time to think.

I levitated some water up out of the moon pool and morphed it into different shapes. Suddenly I heard the familiar noises of someone coming in through the land entrance. I quickly dropped the ball of water I had been molding back into the pool and it landed with a splash.

"Cleo? Are you in here? Cleo...oow!" I heard Lewis' voice echo off the rock walls.

"Yeah I'm in here, are you alright?" I called out. Just then a slightly disoriented looking Lewis stumbled into the main part of the moon pool.

"Yeah, yep I'm fine. Just hit my head on those rocks back back there. So what brings you here?"

"I just needed some time to think."

"About?"

"Bella..."

"Bella?"

"And Will... Will and Bella, mostly Will."

"Huh? Is everything alright?"

"No, in fact everything is not alright."

"Want to tell me about it?"

I let out a sigh and nodded my head "Well, me and Bella were at Will's house... room...shed... whatever you want to call it. We were there trying to find some diving stuff, some fins or something for Will. Bella was looking in some cabinets and I was... well I was being nosy and looking through Will's stuff. I had knocked a folder onto the floor that had Bella's name on it and it was full of notes and drawings and other sciencey looking things on Bella! She didn't even know he was taking all those notes and stuff on her! Isn't that a bit creepy?"

"Hmm... yeah I suppose it is a rather strange. But that is what I do when I do tests on you guys right?"

"What! No this was way different... you take notes and do tests and research on us with us knowing and you do it to help us find answers. What Will was doing was different. Anyways, I tried to show Bella these notes and stuff and she thought I was just trying to come in between Will and her. Which I wasn't! Why would I evn care if they are together, I mean I do care, of course, if Will was untrustworthy and might tell our secret... Well anyways, Bella and I got into a huge fight and now I don't know what to do. How can I make Bella see that something is not right about Will?"

"Well, is something not right about Will? I mean what evidence do you have?"

"That's the problem... I don't have any evidence, just a creepy feeling. My instinct is telling me that we should steer clear of Will."

"I have to agree with you there. I haven't felt right about Will from the day we first met, but I figured it was just me that had that feeling. There really isn't anything we can do about it, let's just keep an eye on Will and in the mean time you should try to make up with Bella."

"Yeah, I guess your right. Hey, what time is it?"

"It is about four thirty, why?"

"Oh! I better get going, Sam said to be home for dinner by five."

Before he could say anything else I dove under the water and sped away.

About a week later all of us made plans to go swimming near some beautiful coral reefs Bella had found and wanted to show to all of us, and I mean ALL of us. Lewis, Zane, and Will were going to ride out there in Lewis' boat.

Lewis and Zane brought snorkeling equipment and Will just brought some fins and goggles, planning to freedive.

Emma planned the whole thing, of course. She packed healthy snacks and drinks into a large ice chest to put on the boat. She made sure everyone was ready on time and that we all left at the right time too.

We even got schedules for the day. Leave at ten thirty, arrive at eleven, swim from eleven to twelve, lunch from twelve to twelve thirty, more swimming from twelve thirty to one thirty, head back to shore at one thirty, arrive at two.

So we arrived, right on schedule, at ten thirty. Rikki, Emma, Bella, and I followed just behind Lewis' boat. We could of course go much faster if we wanted to, but then we would arrive at different times and that would throw the schedule way off. And we simply couldn't do that now could we?

"Wow Bella, your right. This is such a beautiful place." I told Bella as we pulled up along side the boat. The closer we got to the spot the prettier it became.

"I know! I love it here. I just found it the other day and I knew I had to show you all." Bella gushed.

The boys all got ready to swim and soon we all diving down into the crystal clear water .

Large sections of colorful were everywhere. Reds, yellows, greens, even some purple showed up amongst the gorgeous scenery. Fish swam all around us. Tiny silver fish, large rainbow fish, I even saw a few spotted eels.

There was even dolphins all around practically begging to play with us. None of the guys wanted to swim with the wild dolphins. They seemed to think it was unsafe.

Plus the dolphins didn't really want to swim with any who didn't have a tail and weren't fast enough to keep up.

I glanced over towards where the guys were swimming and I noticed that that Will had a disposable underwater camera that he was using to take pictures of the surrounding scenery.

Bella swam over towards Will and gave him a quick kiss on the cheek. They both smiled and I could tell Bella was giggling by the bubbles coming out of her mouth and nose. Giggling under water may sound cute, but it is actually rather unattractive.

I rolled my eyes at them, although I must admit that me and Lewis are not much better.

Suddenly Will turned and snapped a picture of Bella before she could do anything about it. She held her hands up to block her face but he

had already taken the picture.

I just floated there staring at Will in slight shock. Why in the world would he take a picture of Bella as a mermaid! Is he that big of an idiot? What was he thinking?

Rikki angrily swam over towards them and snatched the camera out of Will's hand. The thought "if looks could kill" came to mind when I saw the way she was glaring at Will. She pointed towards the surface and we all swam up.

"What in the world were you thinking! You can't take pictures of us as mermaids! You know there is this thing called a secret and it doesn't work very well if everyone knows!" Rikki shouted to a shocked Will.

"What do you mean? It's not really that big of a deal."

"Not that big of a deal? This is our secret we are talking about. If the word got out that we are mermaids we would most likely end up as lab rats. I think that is a pretty big deal!"

"It's just a picture! No one is going to find out."

"Oh yeah? Well what are you going to tell the person who develops these picture? Oh yeah, this is my girlfriend. She is a mermaid but you can't tell anyone, okay?"

The rest of us just sat back and watched as Rikki lashed out on Will.

"It could just be a costume. I'm sure the photo developer won't even give it a second thought."

"Uh-uh. No way are you going to go get these photos developed."

"Oh come on! There is lots of great photos on here."

"I said no! I don't care if there is some great photos on here. You are going to throw this camera away and make sure no one sees what is on it."

Emma nodded her head and said "Rikki is right, Will. You have to make sure no one sees these pictures."

Rikki shoved the camera into Will's hands. "I don't care if you burn it or smash it into little pieces or just throw it away but make sure no one ever sees what is on it."

"Okay, okay." Will said as he took the camera back from Rikki. He tossed it into his bag that was on the boat.

Emma looked down at her water proof watch and said cheerfully "Twelve o'clock! Time for lunch everybody."

3. Chapter 3

The girls decided to ride back with us in the boat instead of swimming back. So one boat trip and several death glares later we

were back at the docks.

As soon as we pulled up to dock Bella jumped out and walked away without even saying goodbye. Cleo rolled her eyes and said "I better go follow her. Thanks for the boat ride Lewis!" She jumped out of the boat and ran after Bella. Rikki and Emma quickly followed her.

"So... I take it the girls are pretty mad at me?" I said to Lewis and Zane.

"Ooh yeah. You are in major trouble with them. Bella and Cleo will probably forgive you first. But Rikki and Emma aren't ones to let go of a grudge easily." Lewis said as he was tied up his boat.

"The girls don't take their secret lightly. I mean, of course they shouldn't go announcing to everyone that they are mermaids, but sometimes I think they should lighten up a bit." Zane said as he helped Lewis.

I nodded my head and reached into the boat to grab my stuff. "I wasn't trying to expose them or anything like that. I just snapped a picture. It honestly didn't even cross my mind that it could endanger the girls secret." I said.

"Well, try telling that to the moody mermaids." Zane said over his shoulder as he walked away.

"I guess I should get going. I need to be home by three to meet Sophie. She flew in to visit me for the week."

Lewis quickly looked up "Ooh... I don't think you should be telling that to the girls."

"What? Why not?"

"Well, like I said, the girls don't give up a grudge easily. Definitely one against Sophie. I don't think it would be wise to be telling them that she is in town. Especially after this whole picture thing."

"Hmm... maybe your right."

"Then again, if you don't tell them and they find out on their own that would just make things worse."

I nodded my head. "So what do you think I should do?"

Lewis raised up his hands and shook his head "Don't ask me. I definitely don't want to be involved in this. Sorry Will, but you're on your own this time."

And with that he turned and walked away. I was left standing there on the dock deep in thought when I felt someones hands go over my eyes.

"Guess who?" I heard a familiar voice ask.

"Sophie! What are you doing here?"

"Well, you sure do sound happy to see me." Sophie said sarcastically.

I laughed and said "Sorry, that's not what I meant. What I mean is what are you doing here at the dock? You said you were going to meet me at my place at three."

I glanced down at my watch to make sure I wasn't running late. Nope, only two o'clock.

"I got here early. You weren't at your house so I went for a walk. Good luck I guess, running in to you."

I nervously looked around to make sure the girls were out of sight. I couldn't see them but decided we better go back to my place just in case.

"Well lets go on back to my house and we can talk there, okay?" I said as I put my hands on her shoulders and pushed her in the direction of my house.

"Sure, okay. Oh Will! Don't forget your bag!" she said with her back to me as she picked up my bag with my fins and stuff in it.

"Oh, right. Here I'll take it."

"No it's fine. I got it."

"Okay." I shrugged and let her carry it.

*****Sophie's Point of View*****

"Sure, okay. Oh Will! Don't forget your bag!" I said as I bent down and picked up his bag. Suddenly a small disposable camera slipped out.

I looked over my shoulder to make sure Will wasn't looking and fortunatley he wasn't. I picked it up and looked at it curiously. I quickly slipped it into my pocket and stood back up.

"Oh, right. Here I'll take it."

I smiled and said "No it's fine. I got it."

"Okay."

And with that we headed off towards Will's boat shed.

*****Will's Point of View*****

"Do you want something to drink? I have some soda, water, juice-" I said as I looked in the fridge.

"No I'm fine." Sophie said.

"Uh, okay." I said as I pulled a can of soda out of the fridge for myself.

"So Will, have you been keeping up your training?"

"Not really. I don't train so hard every day all day like you had me doing. And I don't do competitions. But I still have been diving for fun with Bella and all her friends."

"What? Bella and all her friends? You must be joking right? I never saw any of those girls even get their feet in the water."

"Oh um... yeah well you would be surprised." I mentally kicked myself for blurting that out.

"I didn't even know you were still with that girl."

"She is really nice Soph, I think you should just give her a chance."

"Yeah well, something seems awfully fishy about her."

I had to restrain from laughing, if only she knew how fishy Bella really is.

"Well, I have some errands that I need to do while I am here in town. I will be home in a little while."

I nodded my head and hoped she wouldn't run into any of the girls while she was out "Okay."

*****Sophie's Point of View*****

I quickly walked out of Will's house and headed straight for the photo developing place. I had no idea what was on this camera, but I had a good feeling about it. I'm not sure why but I think something important is on it.

And if I'm wrong then at least I am doing Will a favor by getting his photos developed.

I pushed open the door to the only drugstore I knew of that would still develop photos. There really wasn't many left because most people now have digital cameras.

A cool blast of air hit me as I walked into the store. I looked around for a moment just to figure out where the photo developing counter was.

I found it in the very back of the store. I stood there for a moment before anyone came over to help me.

"Hello, welcome to Aid Rite. How may I help you." a young girl, maybe fifteen or sixteen, asked me.

"I would like to get heese pictures developed." I said as I waved the small disposable camera in the air.

"Okay," she reached out and took the camera from me, "This camera is almost full and one of newer versions so that will cost you about ten dollars."

"Thats fine, how soon can you have it ready?" I asked, slightly impatient.

"We can have it done in about an hour."

I nodded my head and took out ten dollars. I handed her the money.

"Okay and may I please have your name in case I am not here when you return?"

"Sophie Benjamin."

"Thank you Sophie."

I turned and walked out of there, trying to think of something to do to pass the time. I decided to go and see what movies are playing.

Luckily the movie theater wasn't that far from the drugstore so I could just walk.

I glanced at the list of movies outside the theater to see if there is anything I might want to see. Hmm... several animated things, some sort of aliens taking over the world thing, a super hero movie, a love story...

Nothing was really jumping out at me so I decided to save my money and just do some window shopping instead.

Soon the hour was up and I could go back and pick up my photos. I made my way back to the drugstore and walked right to the back counter that develops the photos.

"Oh hello! I have your pictures right here." said the same young girl as she handed me a small envelope of photos.

"Thank you." I said as I took the envelope. I tried to glance at her name tag but I couldn't see it too well. It kind of looked like it said Cariba. Wait, maybe it said Phoebe. Oh well, her name doesn't matter.

I walked out of store and sat down on a bench just outside. I quickly opened the envelope and pulled out the pictures.

They were all pictures Will must have taken when he was diving. Lots of fish and coral. It looked like a very beautiful spot.

I sighed. Looks like it was nothing important. Oh well, at least I did a favor for- wait, what is that! The very last picture was a picture of Bella underwater. With a fish tail?

Bella is a mermaid? It must just be a costume or photoshop or something. Nevermind, it couldn't be photoshop, I just had the pictures developed. It must be a costume of some sort.

But what if it isn't? It would explain why she is so... weird. And why she always stays away from water.

She could be dangerous! She could be evil... What if she has Will under some sort of spell? No, she is weird, but not evil. I least I don't think.

Does Will know about this? He must, it is his camera. And he said he has been diving with Bella and her friends.

Her friends! They must be mermaids too. I have never seen them anywhere near water either.

Is Will a mermaid too? Or... merman I guess. That would explain why he stopped diving. Bella must have done this to him!

Wait, wait, wait. I am jumping to conclusions. Will is not a merman. I think?

Well, there is only one way to find out.

*****Will's point of view*****

I was sitting on my couch taking a nap when I heard someones footsteps just outside. Sophie must be back.

She walked in the door and said "Hey Will! How are you doing?"

"I'm fine. Did you get your errands done?"

"Yeah, yeah I got them done."

I watched her as she walked to the sink and filled up a glass of water. She walked over towards me and suddenly dumped the glass on me. "Uh, Soph? What was that for?" I asked as I tried to shake some of the water off.

"So your not a merman?"

My eyes bugged out of my head. What? Why in the world did she think I was a merman? Did she know anything?

"Uh, no. I'm not."

She sighed and flopped down on the couch. "Oh, ok. Well sorry about that."

"Soph, why would you think I'm a merman?"

"I got these pictures developed and one of them is of Bella and it sure looks like she is a mermaid." she said as she held up an envelope of pictures.

I gasped. She looked at me suspiciously and said "What? Is Bella a mermaid?"

I looked down. What do I say? I have always been a terrible liar.

"No..."

"Will, you are lying to me. I can tell. You are making you lying face. It looks like you just drank a carton of sour milk."

"Sophie, it must just be a costume or something." I said while doing my best at trying not to make the sour milk face.

"Will, who took this photo?"

"I did."

"Well then what do you mean? You either know it is a costume or you know she is a mermaid if you really did take the picture."

Arg. Why didn't I think that through? "Well, which is it?" Sophie asked impatiently.

"Look Sophie, you can't tell anyone. This is the girls secret and you aren't even supposed to know."

"What? Those other girls are mermaids too! I knew it!"

Ahh! Me and my big mouth. How could I just blurt that out like that.

"N-n-no, it is just Bella." I said, trying to cover up my mistake.

"Sour milk face. You are lying. Why are you trying so hard to keep this a secret? For all you know they have you under their spell."

I rolled my eyes "Soph, they are mermaids, not witches. They don't do spells."

"Uh-huh. That is what they want you to think. So, when do we expose them?"

I looked up, shocked "What? Expose them?"

"Well, yeah. Will this could mean big money for us. We would probably be milionaires over night. But only if we tell everyone."

"No, Sophie. We can't. They are human beings you know."

"No Will! They aren't! They are freaks. Unhuman creatures that we need to expose and trap before they do the human race any harm. They are clearly evil."

"They aren't evil! What ever gave you that idea? They are just different then us. But they are still human girls."

"Okay, so lets say they aren't evil. We still should expose them. It would make us so much money! We can sell this information to aquariums, scientists, reporters,-"

"Sophie! I said no! Bella is my girlfriend. I am not going to sell her to anyone! And the other girls are my friends. And they are human! We can't sell them. That would be illegal."

"Not sell them, Will. Sell the information."

"Whatever! My answer is no!"

Sophie sighed. "I am not going to do this without you, Will."

"Well then I guess you are not going to this."

"You will come to your senses, soon. And when you do, we will expose them and become rich."

4. Chapter 4

**AN: Hi guys! So I forgot to put this in the other chapters but I don't own anything. **

PLEASE REVIEW! I really love it when people review. I like to know that there are people who are actually interested in my story and following it. I WANT TO KNOW WHAT YOU THINK! REVIEW!

I am sorry that I keep switching POV. It is kind of necessary to the story and I know I could write in third person but it is personally much easier for me to write from a person's point of view. So I am sorry if it gets confusing! I try to make it pretty clear when I switch, but I know it can still get confusing.

Okay! So on with the story!

*****Will's Point of View*****

Sophie is driving me crazy! She won't shut up about the girls being mermaids. I made a huge mistake. I didn't even think through the things that I was saying.

I haven't told Bella that Sophie is in town. And I don't think I will. She is still mad at me over the picture and won't answer any of my calls. I can't even imagine what she would do if she found out Sophie knew the girls are mermaids.

I decided to go for a quick jog on the beach to clear my head. I grabbed my running shoes and pulled them on.

"Where are you going?" I heard Sophie ask. She was staying with me since she didn't want to spend any extra money on a hotel.

"I was going to out for a run on the beach. Is that okay with you?" I asked sarcastically, but I don't think she heard the sarcasm in my voice.

"Yes that's okay. You better hurry, soon it will be too hot outside."

I rolled my eyes and grabbed a water bottle. I quickly ran out the door before Sophie could say anything else.

The cool morning breeze rolled off the waves and blew in my face as I jogged down the beach. I ran down close to the waves, my feet skimming the water's edge.

How was I going to tell Bella that Sophie knew? She wouldn't even answer my calls. Should I tell her? Or should I just keep it a secret. Sophie will be leaving at the end of the week.

No, I can't do that. Bella is bound to find out sooner or later. And the sooner I tell her the less mad she will be. I hope.

I suddenly stopped and stared at the figure walking along the beach. Her back was to me, but I could easily tell it was Bella.

I quickly started running again, this time with a purpose. "Bella! Bella wait up!"

She turned around, anger evident in her eyes. "What do you want Will?"

"I j-just wanted to talk to you, you haven't been answering my calls." I said, out of breath from running so fast to catch up with her.

"That is because I don't want to talk to you."

"Please Bella just listen to me-"

"I said no Will! I don't want to hear anything you have to say. What you did was stupid and careless. What if someone found that camera? What would we do then?"

"I...uh..." What do I say? Should I tell her? Yes, I should. I can't possibly keep it a secret and she will find out eventually anyways.

"Actually Bella, Sophie found the camera."

"What do you mean, Sophie found the camera? Sophie is England. Right?"

"Well... she is visting. Just for this week. And then she is going to go back."

"Why didn't you tell me before now! Were you ever going to tell me? Or were you just going to keep this a secret!"

"I was going to tell you! I just hadn't-"

"Will, did Sophie see the picture?"

"Well, yeah."

"What! How could you Will! I really trusted you!"

"The camera just fell out of my bag! Sophie found it and got the pictures developed, not me! I was going to throw that camera away the mintue I got home."

"Yeah, but you are the one who was stupid enough to take the picture in the first place!"

"I said I'm sorry! It was dumb of me, but I wasn't planning on showing anyone the picture!"

"That's not the point! Anyone could have found that camera! And someone did."

"I tried to convince her it was just a costume, but she didn't believe me."

"Sure you did. I bet that as soon as she asked you about the picture, you told her the truth."

"No Bella! I didn't! It was all a mistake."

"I want to believe you, Will."

"Then do! I am so sorry about all of this, can't we put it behind us?"

"Maybe, Will. But not yet. I need some time to think. At least she only knows about me, and not the other girls."

I quickly looked down. Do I tell her Sophie knows about them too?

"Will? Are you okay?"

"Yeah, yeah I'm fine."

"Are you sure? You are making a funny face, like you just smelled some rotten cheese or something."

"Bella, Sophie knows about the other girls too."

"What! No no no. She can't! It was bad enough that she knew about me, but the other girls too? Will, how could you!"

"I didn't mean too! It just kind of slipped out! It was an accident, I promise."

"I don't know if I can trust you anymore. How do we know you won't go around "accidentally" blurting out things."

"Because I won't! It was a one time thing Bella. Please forgive me!"

"I'm sorry Will, but this kind of thing is unforgivable."

"Bella? Are you breaking up with me?"

"I don't know, Will."

"Bella, please. I am so so sorry. This kind of thing won't happen again, I promise. Please, won't you trust me again?"

"But I don't. Trust you, that is. I'm sorry Will but I think we have to break up."

"Bella! You can't break up with me! We-"

"I have to go, Will. I can't talk to you anymore."

She turned and walked away. She is clearly angry. And I am angry too. How could she not see that this was a mistake!

I can't believe she broke up with me! How could she? I know all of her secrets. I figured we would be together forever.

Maybe this whole thing will blow over and we will get back together.

But is that really what I want? She certainly seemed unreasonable a few minutes ago. Maybe it is better this way.

This is so unfair! I need to get back at her somehow. I need to make her see that you can't mess with me. But how?

Then it hit me, her biggest secret.

I stormed back to my place and pushed open the door.

"Sophie! Sophie are you in here?"

"Yeah Will, I'm right here. No need to yell."

"I'm ready."

"Ready?"

"To expose them."

*****Sophie's Point of View*****

I grinned. "I knew you would come to your senses, Will."

"Yeah well, when do we expose them?"

"Not that I'm complianing or anything, but you sure weren't like this yesterday. What changed your mind?"

"None of your business, Sophie."

"Geez, okay. No need to be rude about it."

"So, where do we start?"

"Slow down, Will. We don't need to be in such a hurry. There is someone I would like to... consult with before we begin."

"What do you mean?"

"Just a business opportunity. There is someone I know who I think would be very interested to invest in this."

"All right, but hurry. I would like to set our plan in motion as soon as possible."

"I will. You made the right descision by the way. You won't be sorry." I said as I grabbed my purse and the picture and headed out the door.

I pushed the long strands of beads out of my way and walked into the cafe. Rikki's cafe, to be specific. Sweat was dripping down my face. It was hot outside but cool and air consditioned inside.

I glanced around. It was busy and everyone seemed to talking at once. Quickly, I headed straight to the back and knocked on the door to Zane's office. "Come in." he called out from inside.

I pushed open the door and walked right in closing it behind me.

"Rikki, did you get the-"

"Hello Zane."

"Sophie. Uh, what are you doing here?"

"I have a business proposition for you."

"No thanks."

"You haven't even heard what I have to say yet."

"I don't care. You are not welcome here, Sophie. I suggest you leave, now."

"Hear me out Zane. I have some very interesting information that could quite possibly make us both millionaires over night."

He hesitated before he answered. I could tell he was interested. "You have two minutes to explain before I kick you out of my cafe."

I took the picture out of my purse and smacked it down on the desk in front of him "This, Zane, is a picture of a mermaid. A real mermaid. Bella, to be exact. She and those other freaks she always hangs out with are real life mermaids!"

Zane shook his head "Sophie where did you get this picture?"

"From Will, he took it himself."

"Sophie this must just be a photoshop or something. There is no such thing as mermaids."

"It isn't photoshop! I had the pictures developed myself."

"Well then it is probably a costume. I bet Will is just playing a prank on you. What other proof do have besides this one slightly blurry photo?"

"No, it is not a prank. I am sure of it. In fact I could prove it to you right now. Those girls are probably in the cafe. All we would have to do is go out there and spill something on them and you would have your proof."

"Sophie, what makes you think the other girls are also mermaids?"

"Think about it Zane! They are always together and I have never seen any of them go anywhere near the water. And they are just plain weird! Don't tell me you haven't noticed."

"Okay, but you don't have any solid evidence! This whole thing is probably just a hoax."

"Zane if you don't want in on this that is fine with me. I just thought you would want in on a good business opportunity. Think of the money!"

Just then a clearly distressed Rikki with juice all over her arm ran

in the door "Zane do have a towel I-" Her eyes bugged out at the sight of me.

Zane tossed her a set of keys and said "Storage room! Go!" Rikki turned and ran out of there as fast as she could mouthing "five...four..three..."

"There you go Zane, isn't that evidence... wait, how did you know... are you and Rikki back together? Did you know that they are mermaids?"

Zane looked down and shook his head. "Sophie you can't tell anyone about this."

"No way! This is going to make me millions. I was doing you a favor by clueing you in to this. You really have changed Zane. The Zane I used to know would have exposed those girls the second he knew about them."

"Yeah well, I'm not the Zane you used to know."

"I'm leaving. I am going to expose those freaks for what they really are and become rich and famous."

"They aren't freaks! They are just regular girls that are a bit different."

I snatched up the picture and grabbed my purse. "Goodbye Zane."

He put his head on his desk and muttered something I couldn't hear as I walked out the door.

5. Chapter 5

****AN: Hi everyone! So here is the next chapter.****

****I don't own Cleo, Rikki, Bella, Emma, Lewis, Zane, Will, Sophie, or their awesome mermaid tails. Although I wish I did :p Those are some awesome mermaid tails...****

****ANYWAYS! On with the story. Drum roll please!`****

*******Rikki's Point of View*******

"Storage room! Go!" Zane said as he tossed me the set of keys. I was in shock. What was Sohpie doing here?

I didn't have time to think about it though. I quickly turned and ran out of there, headed for the storage room where we kept the mops and brooms and other stuff like that.

I fumbled with the keys trying to find the right one. I didn't have much time before my tail showed up.

Just as I got the door unlocked my tail appeared and I flopped down onto the floor. Looking around to make sure no one was nearby, I wriggled into the storage room and shoved the door closed with my fin.

I let out a sigh of relief. I made it. The storage room was small, really more of a closet, and coated with dust. I coughed and tried to reach for the light switch so that at least it wouldn't be dark.

After a few tries I gave up. I just couldn't reach it from right here on the ground. I was holding out my hand steam drying my tail as the door opened and the light got switched on.

It was Zane. He stepped inside and quickly shut the door behind him. "Are you alright?" he asked with genuine concern in his voice.

I just glared at him though "What is _she _doing here?"

"Um, Rikki... I have some bad news."

"Huh? What's wrong?"

"Sophie, she... well she knows."

"Knows?"

"Yeah... you know, the secret."

"The... oh! You mean _the_ secret?"

"Yeah."

I shook my head in disbelief. "What? But... how?"

"She found the camera and got the photo's developed."

"Wait, why did she tell you this?"

"She was trying to get me to help her out and get a portion of the money from exposing you guys."

"Oh, so she doesn't realize you know about us?"

"Well, she didn't."

"Zane! Why would you tell her you knew?"

"I didn't! I was going along with it, thinking that maybe I could change her mind. She figured it out on her own."

I groaned. "I knew we couldn't trust Will!"

"Well, we haven't heard his side of the the story. Maybe it is all a mistake and he didn't mean for her to find out."

"It doesn't matter if he didn't mean for her to find out. The point is that she did find out! He should have been more careful."

By now I was all dry and my tail had disappeared. "Come on, lets go find the rest of the mermaid club and tell them what has happened." Zane said as reached out his hand to help me up.

"Mermaid club?" I said as I took his hand.

"Yeah, you know. You, me, Cleo, Lewis, Emma, Bella, and Will. Except maybe not Will. Not until we figure out what is going on."

I chuckled "Got it. Mermaid club. I like it. Good call on the Will thing though. For now anyways."

We didn't have to look far. We walked into the main part of the cafe and over at our favorite table was Cleo, Lewis, and Emma.

"Hey guys, any idea where Bella is?" I asked as Zane and I sat down.

"Yeah, she texted me saying she would meet us here. She should be here any minute now." Cleo said.

"Oh okay. Well, me and Zane have some news we need to share but I guess we will wait until she gets here so we can tell everyone at the same time."

"What is going on? Is something wrong?" Emma asked.

"Well, yes actually something is wrong."

Just then Bella walked in and headed straight over to where we were sitting.

"Hey Bella! How are you?" Cleo cheerfully asked.

"Eh, not so good actually. I have something I need to tell you guys." she said as she sat down.

We all looked at her expectantly, waiting for whatever she had to say.

"I broke up with Will." she blurted out, slightly nervous looking.

I shot a questioning glance over towards Zane, wondering if he knew about this. He just shrugged his shoulders so I assumed he didn't.

"Oh, Bella. I'm sorry." Emma said.

"It's okay. I'm really... not that upset about it. I figured that if we ever broke up I would just be crushed. But strangely, it just feels better this way. He was really being a jerk."

"Thats good! I think. Is it good?" Cleo asked.

Bella nodded her head and smiled "Yeah, yeah it is good."

"Well, I don't mean to rain down on the good news parade but ... Sophie is back."

Everyone at the table seemed to pause for a moment, waiting for my words to sink in.

Everyone except Emma, apparantly. "Sophie?"

"I thought we told you about Sophie. You know, Will's sister." Cleo said.

"Oh! That Sophie. Yeah I remember. She sounded pretty bad."

I scoffed and looked at her "Yeah, I think bad is an understatement."

"Oh come on. You guys are acting like it is the end of the world. What could she possibly do that would be that bad?"

"Tell everyone our secret." I said, with no emotion.

"What? You never told me she knew." Emma said, confused.

"She doesn't." Cleo, Bella, and Lewis all said at the same time with simlilar looks of confusion on there faces.

"Correction, she didn't." Zane said.

"Apparently she found the camera and got the photos developed. Or Will showed her. We aren't really clear on the details." I said with a shrug of my shoulders.

"What! Will wouldn't tell Sophie. It must have been a mistake that she found out." Bella said.

"Are you sure about that? When you guys broke up today, did he seem angry afterwards?" I asked.

"I-I don't know. Maybe a little bit? I walked away before he could say much more. But still, he wouldn't betray us like that."

"Well, we don't have proof that he did or didn't tell her. Again, the details of how Sophie found out are not at all clear. Let's not blame him until we know more." Zane said.

"Will wouldn't tell anyone our secret." Bella said quietly, sounding more like she was trying to convince herself than convince us.

"How did you guys find out about this, anyways?" Emma asked.

"Sophie came to my office, offering to let me in on some of the money she would get from exposing you guys. I tried to play along to get more information, but..."

"But Zane is an idiot and let the truth slip out." I added.

"I am not an idiot! And it was your fault anyways. Just walking in there ready to turn into a mermaid at any moment."

"Oh yeah! Might as well just make an annoucment to the whole cafe. Could you maybe keep it down when talking about out fishy problem? And how was I supposed to know you had someone in the office!"

"Well you could at least have knocked or something!"

"Knocked? Zane it is our office. You know, as in half mine? I shouldn't have to knock."

"I know that! I just mean when-"

"When you have someone trying to hunt us down and sell us alive in our office?"

"I was trying to help! You know, get information from her and-"

"Hey. Guys... Guys? Rikki! Zane! Stop it! Now is really not the best time to go into another round of who-can-come-up-with-the-best-insults!" Lewis shouted. We both shut up and sat quietly.

"Now we need to come up with a way to stop Sophie before she takes it too far." Lewis added.

"But how? And how far exactly is she going to go?" Emma asked.

"Maybe we could spy on her? Oh! And we could get cool spy gear and black outfits and beanies and sunglasses and walkie talkies and-" Cleo babbled.

"Cleo, I don't think I like the idea of any of you girls going near Sophie or Will. They could have any sort of trap set up to catch you and expose you guys. We need to be really careful, maybe even staying inside for the next week or two until this settles down and we figure out how to stop her." Lewis said.

"Wait! Slow down. The next week or two? There is no way I am going to stay inside for a whole a week!" I protested.

"I hate to admit it but I think Lewis is right on this one. We wouldn't want one of you girls getting deliberately splashed in public. Or... getting caught or anything." Zane said.

"Zane! I can handle myself. I don't need to hide away from Sophie, of all people!" I said.

"I know you can handle yourself Rikki. I'm just worried okay? It might not be just Sophie you would have to hide from. If she has gotten any more people on her side who are ready to expose you we could very well have a major problem."

"We already have a major problem! And I am not going to just hide away when I could actually help."

"Help? How! Using your powers?"

"Well, why not?"

"If it is proof they want then going out and using your powers to stop them would pretty be giving them what they are looking for. The only way to stop them would be to prove that you are not a ... you know, and we can't exactly do that can we? Plus, we could be talking government forces with taser guns and stuff."

"I kind of doubt Sophie would have gotten the attention of the government with a blurry photograph."

"But you don't know! You don't know that! What if she has and you guys get captured in the middle of the night and taken away and we

never see or hear from you again! What then?"

"Zane I-"

"You don't understand. This could be serious and we wouldn't even know it until it is too late."

If I didn't know better I would say he was on the edge of tears. But Zane Benett doesn't cry. Right?

Suddenly he stood up and stormed off in the direction of our office. I quickly stood up after the moment of shock wore off and I ran after him.

"Zane? Zane are you in there?" I asked as I softly knocked on the door to the office.

"Yeah, come in." I heard a nasaly version of Zane's voice call out.

I pushed the door open and shut it behind me as I walked into the office. I looked at Zane who was sitting on the couch with his elbows on his knees and head in his hands.

"Zane? Zane are you alright?" I asked nervously as I walked over and sat down next to him on the couch. I had never seen him this way before, and it was kind of freaking me out. I had no idea how to react to this kind of Zane.

He looked up at me with red rimmed eyes and wet cheeks. He had obviously been crying but I could tell he was trying to hid it. He wiped his face on his sleeve and put on his best normal face, but it wasn't working.

Did I cause this? Was it something I said? It made me feel awful that it might have been me who did this to him. Where was the fearless bad boy Zane who always seemed to be putting on a show, trying to prove he was the best at something or other.

He opened his mouth, about to say something. For a second I thought he would try to lie, and say he was fine and that everything was alright.

And secretly I was hoping that was what he would do. Then we could smile and get up and walk back out there like nothing had happened. It would be so much easier, I was never good at the whole feelings thing anyways. I was especially not good with other people's feelings. I always seemed to say the wrong thing.

"No, I'm not alright. I'm terrible in fact." He answered honestly.

I was scared. What do I say now? 'Oh okay. Let's go on back out there then. Would you like another juice?'

Do I say anything? Should I just sit and listen? I could do that, just sitting and listening.

"Oh." I squeaked out, barely louder than a whisper.

"Do you... do you, um... want to talk about it?" I asked. That is

what they do in movies. They talk about it. They have a heart to heart type of thing. And then everything will be fine and we will go on out and order ourselves some more cranberry boosters.

"Rikki, I am going to admit that I am scared. For you. To lose you. I know I am probably worrying over nothing, we don't even know anything yet.

But I just keep thinking about all of the what ifs. What if Sophie tells someone? Everyone? A scientist? She doesn't have much proof right now but she knows the truth and could easily get more proof if she wanted some.

She won't give up on this. I know she won't. And if she has Will on her side she... I don't even want to think about it. I mean Will, for goodness sake! He is Will! We trusted him. He was an official member of the mermaid club and he just... betrayed us. All of us. Your secret. And my secret too. And Lewis'. We all share this and he just backed away from it and betrayed us."

"You don't know that. Maybe it was just an accident that she found out and really he is going to help us."

"I know that is what I keep saying, but I don't really believe a word of it. He betrayed us. I can just feel it."

"But that doesn't have anything to do with you. Why are you so upset about this? None of it is your fault."

"But it is! If I could have lied better to Sophie, or thought quicker when you came running into the room. If I could have made her believe that I wanted in on that deal then maybe I could have stopped her."

I gasped "Oh Zane, that is not what I meant when I said you let the truth slip out earlier. I was just joking! You did everything right. You couldn't have done it any better. I came running into that room and you got me out of there in time because you thought so fast. I could have just flopped down on the floor right then and then she could have taken even more photos or something. Nothing you could have said would have changed her mind anyways. You know how annoyingly stubborn she is."

"I just feel like if this gets out it or if something happened to you it would be my fault and I couldn't live with that. I couldn't lose you Rikki, I love you."

I froze. What did he say? I must have heard that wrong. There was no way he said...

"W-what? I'm sorry I think I heard you wrong. What was that last part?"

"I love you Rikki. And I always will."

My brain stopped working. What do I say now? I can't just not say anything. That would be rude. Do I love him back? What is love? I love my dad. But that is different. I love Cleo, Emma, Lewis, and Bella. That is different too. Love? Uhh...

Say you love him back, dummy! Yeah that is what I should do. They do that in movies too. Someone says I love you, and then you say it back. And then it gets all mushy and sappy and the music starts playing.

"Oh."

Oh? Oh! Arg! That isn't what I meant to say. What do I do now? Run. That was my first thought, anyways. Get up and run away. But that would be really rude.

"Me too." I quickly added. Me too? That isn't any better!

He raised his eyebrow at me but didn't say anything.

"You, I mean! I love you too. Not me. I don't love me. I mean I do love me! I don't have body issues or anything. I just meant that I love you. Not me. You know, me too, like I love you back. Also. Like how you love me. Because you love me."

Ahh! Babbling is Cleo's thing. What is wrong with me today? I should have come up with some sarcastic remark. That was much more Rikki-ish. But I couldn't. I couldn't think. He loves me? He loves me!

He grinned and pulled me into a hug. "I'm sure everything will work out fine. I'm probably being silly and worrying about nothing."

"Uh-huh" I mumbled and nodded my head. He loves me?

"Come on." he said as stood up and reached his hand out to help me up. "Let's go back out there. The rest of the mermaid club is probably waiting for us."

I took his hand and walked back out there with a huge smile on my face. He loves me!

**Well, there it is. **

Didn't you love that cute Zikki fluff at the end! I didn't really know how Rikki would react in that situation so I just kind of winged it. I hope she isn't too OOC.

**REVIEW REVIEW REVIEW! All you have to do is push that little button down there. I think I can hear it saying "Push me!" **

6. Chapter 6

AN: Okay! So here is the next chapter of exposed. I hope you like it.

REVIEW REVIEW REVIEW REVIEW!

Please, please, please, please review! It really means a lot to me!

"Uh, Rikki? What is up with the huge smile?" Emma asked me.

"Yeah, you sure do seem good-moody." Cleo added.

"Weren't we just talking about doom and gloom a minute ago?" Lewis said.

Cleo slapped him on his arm "Lewis! Don't ruin it."

"Ow!" Lewis whined.

"But seriously Rikki, what's up? Are you okay?" Emma asked.

"Yeah. Yeah I am great. Fantastic in fact. Everything is wonderful!" I responded rather cheerfully as I sat down next to Zane.

"Okay, who are you and what have you done with Rikki?" Lewis asked.

"Lewis!" Cleo shouted, this time stomping on his foot.

"Ow! Again! Could you stop that please?"

"Uh, okay. I have no idea why you are so happy Rikki, but we need to come up with a way to stop Sophie and Will." Emma said, which earned a glare from Bella.

"Or just Sophie..." Emma added.

"I don't know why you guys think that Will has anything to do with this." Bella said, crossing her arms.

"Bella, you broke up with him! He showed the picture to Sophie to get back at you. Why don't see that?" Emma asked.

"Will isn't like that..." Bella mumbled.

"Maybe he wasn't like that, but anger can do weird things to people. He may have acted without thinking. It doesn't really matter. What matters now is that Sophie knows and Will is probably not on our side anymore."

"You don't know that!"

"Bella! It is the truth. Just admit it." Emma said.

Bella shook her head but had a look of defeat on her face "I feel so confused. Let's just figure out a way to fix this. Fighting isn't going to fix anything."

Lewis nodded his head in agreement "Yeah, fighting isn't going to fix anything. I think you guys should lay low for the next few weeks and see if this thing dies down. No swimming, no Mako-"

"What! No swimming? Come on! What do you expect us to do for the next few weeks?" I whined.

"What happened to the happy, good mood Rikki? I think I liked her better." Lewis said.

I just scowled at him and crossed my arms.

"But like I said, absolutely no swimming. There could be hidden cameras or something out there. You guys don't have to stay inside the whole time, but just be really careful. I don't think we want a repeat of the Denman incident." Lewis said.

"Definitley not. I love swimming but Lewis is right, we need to lay low." Cleo said.

"I agree. And we should be extra careful around water." Emma said.

"Emma, we have managed not to reveal our secret around water yet. It isn't like the water is going to be after us, trying to get us wet." I said.

"Well there was that one time..." Cleo said.

"That doesn't count! The water really was out to get us that time." I said.

"Okay, your probably right. We have managed, somehow, to make it this far. But Sophie could have any kind of different traps set up." Emma said.

"Traps? You mean like trying to capture us?" Cleo asked.

"Maybe. I don't see why not." I said.

"I suppose... but I meant something more simple. If she even just got us wet in public, we would be done for." Emma said.

"So... what should we do?" Cleo asked.

"I don't know. There isn't really anything we can do. Just law low for now I guess." Emma said.

We all glumly agreed, not looking forward to a few weeks of no swimming.

"Well, me and Zane have to go." I said as I stood up and pulled Zane up out of his seat.

"What, we have to go?" Zane asked.

"Oh yes, very important stuff. Come on Zane, you don't want us to be late do you?"

"Uh, no I guess not." Zane said.

"Bye guys! We will see you later." I said as I waved over my shoulder to the four confused faces sitting around the table.

"Rikki? Where are we going?" Zane asked once we were outside of the cafe.

"Swimming."

"Swimming? What... Rikki no. You can't go swimming. Did all the stuff we just talked about in the cafe go in one ear and out the other?"

"Zaaane. Come on. Just one last swim before a few weeks of confinement."

"Okay, just so you know I am very against this, but why did you tell me? What do you need me for?"

"You are going to drive me out to where I want to go swimming."

"Huh? Why do I need to drive you? Can't you just dive into the water and swim away?"

"Will probably told Sophie all of our usual swimming spots and if she was going to put up some hidden cameras that is where they would be. But we can avoid them if you take me out in your Zodiac to a place we never go swimming."

"Rikki, I am very against the idea of you swimming at all."

"Please. Just this one last time and then I will be a good girl and not go anywhere near water for the next few weeks."

"Just one last time?"

"Just one last time. A quick swim, that's all I'm asking."

Zane nodded his head and said "Fine, but we have to go far out of our way. Somewhere where you never go swimming. Just to be safe."

"Okay, how about that place a few miles west of Mako. No one ever goes there. We can go the other way so we don't have to go past Mako, just to be safe."

"Yeah, that could work." Zane said as we approached the dock where his red zodiac was tied up. He untied and I jumped in.

"Here." he said as he tossed me a large blue tarp.

"What's this for?" I asked, holding it up.

"Hold it over you while we are moving. You don't want to get sprayed, anyone in one of the surrounding boats could see you."

"Oh, right."

Soon we were moving and I was huddled under the tarp, trying not to get wet. It certainly isn't the most comfortable way to travel. Just as I was starting to get sea sick, the boat stopped and Zane pulled the tarp off of me.

"Well, here we are. Don't go swimming too far from here. Just stay right around this area." Zane said.

"Aye-aye, captain." I said with a mock salute.

Zane rolled his eyes "Just hurry up, I still don't feel right about this."

I dove into the water and smiled as I felt my legs morphing into my

long beautiful tail. I looked around me to see what kind of area this was.

It certainly wasn't as pretty as any of our usual swimming spots, but it would do. It was fairly deep and there wasn't much coral. What few coral formations there was seemed dull and not very colorful.

I looked down and was surprised to see a boat down at the bottom of the ocean floor. I smiled, it is always fun to explore a shipwreck.

I dove straight down and quickly propelled myself through the water until I was at the very bottom. The boat was small and it layed on it's side.

It seemed pretty old, maybe from the fifties. It kind of reminded me of Miss Chatham's boat, but slightly smaller.

It looked like it had been there for a long time. It was pretty banged up and it had coral and algae growing all over it.

After a few tries I got the rusty door open. I peeked inside and looked around. There was the usual stuff that you would expect to find in a boat. There was also a small kitchenette and a couch that looked like it folded out into a bed.

I pulled open drawers and cabinets, trying to find something interesting. Most of the stuff was either entirely disintegrated, rusted beyond recognition, or covered in algae.

I spent at least twenty minutes down there looking around before I decided I needed some air. I guess I would go ahead and go up and then we would go home. Wouldn't want to keep Zane waiting, I did say just a quick swim.

I set down the stuff I was looking at and swam over towards the door. I had gotten half way out when suddenly the door snapped closed right on my tail. I screamed out in pain but the water muffled the sound.

My tail felt broken, but I suppose I wouldn't know since I had never gotten injured in my mermaid form before. I pulled the door off of me and winced in pain. The rusty door cut into my tail and left a huge gash right across it.

The water around me turned red as I struggled to swim towards the surface. My tail felt like dead weight and didn't even seem to be moving. It was numb and I didn't have any control over it. I was forced to use my arms to swim up towards the boat.

Finally the surface seemed close. With one last pull I was up out of the water, coughing as I held onto the side of the boat.

Zane dropped the motorcycle magazine he was reading and rushed over towards me.

"Rikki! What happened? Are you okay?" Zane asked.

I coughed some more and took in deep breaths of air as I tried to catch my breath.

"I-I got my t-tail stuck in the d-door." I said.

"You what? You got your tail stuck in a door?"

"C-could you help me out?"

"Oh! Yeah."

He reached down into the water and grabbed my arms, pulling me out. I plopped down onto the boat. He gasped as he saw the damage that had been done to my tail.

I layed there sprawled out on the floor with my head propped up on edge of the boat. My tail seemed to be twisted at a weird angle and it was all bloody.

"Oh Rikki, what happened?"

"I-I told you. M-my tail got caught in a d-door." I said, followed by more coughing.

"Rikki, are you sure you didn't hit your head too?"

"There was a b-boat down there that I was exploring. My tail got caught in the door."

Zane put his hand to his forehead, clearly distressed. "Well, what do we do? We can't exactly take you into the hospital like this."

"Well duh."

"Rikki! This looks serious. We can't just let it heal. It looks like it is broken."

"I will just dry off. I am sure that once I've got my legs back the injuries will just transfer to my legs."

"You think?"

"Well it is worth a shot. And who knows, maybe the injuries will just disapear all together as soon as I change back. That is what happened with Emma's hair."

"Emma's hair? What... oh nevermind. Just dry off."

I held my hand out over my tail and began to steam dry myself. I winced as the heat hit my injuries.

"And there we go! All dry."

"Uh, Rikki? Why aren't you changing back?"

My smile faltered and I looked down at my tail. I reached my hand up and felt my hair to see if it was all dry. It felt like it was.

"Maybe I'm just not dry all the way yet. Let me try again."

I held my hand out and repeated the process but I only ended up

getting hot and sweaty.

"What is going on!" I said.

"Has this ever happened before?"

"No! Never. As soon as I get dry I change back. That is how it always goes."

"Well, it's probably because you're hurt. You must not be able to change back while you have broken bones."

"You think?"

"Yeah. That is what makes the most sense. I can't think of any other reason, can you?"

"No, you're probably right. So what should we do?"

"I have no idea. Hospital, maybe?"

"Hospital? Hospital! Really Zane?"

"What else can we do! We can't just leave you in mermaid form for the rest of your life."

"Maybe Lewis could fix it?"

"Lewis is one smart guy. And he knows a lot about... stuff. But he isn't a doctor."

"Well it is worth a shot. I want to try it before we go to the hospital. Can you imagine the comotion that would cause? Plus, how would they know what to do? I doubt that they operate on mermaids every day."

"Maybe a vet..."

"Zane, people don't get their fish operated on either. If your fish is dying you just flush it."

"Okay, so Lewis?"

"That seems like our best option."

"Wait, how do we get you back? If you are just laying here when we pull up into the dock..."

"I will cover up with the tarp."

"Well, okay. But how do we transport you to... where are we going?"

"Uh, Cleo's house I guess. I am pretty sure her parents and Kim are out of town."

"Okay, so how do we get you there?"

"The canal! We can just drive right up to the back of her house."

"Good idea. So Cleo's house it is."

"Hand me your phone, I will call Lewis. And Cleo. Just to make sure she is home and her parents aren't."

"Where is yours?"

"In my pocket..."

Zane laughed "So you can't get your phone back until you are fully healed?"

"That is what it looks like."

"Here. Just dial the number and push-"

"I know how to use a phone!"

"Okay, okay."

"Hi Cleo!... yeah... can me and Zane come over?... Are your parents home?... Great! And Kim?... okay... yeah that's fine... I was just about to call Lewis... well we had a, um, nevermind. We will just be there in about thirty minutes. Meet us out back ... okay... see you then... bye."

"She is home?"

"Yep, and Lewis is there with her."

"Great. Cover up just in case we pass any boats on the way back."

I pulled the tarp over me and bit my lip as it brushed up against my injury. Soon we were moving again, this time much faster than before. The constant bouncing of the small boat hurt, but I didn't say anything because I didn't want to worry Zane.

Thirty minutes later we were pulled up behind Cleo's house. I pulled the tarp down and poked my head out.

I watched Zane as he tied up the zodiac. "Okay, I guess I will carry you inside?"

"Oh no, I got it. I will just wiggle my way up there. Of course you will carry me inside!"

"Right. Sorry."

He bent down and tried to pick me up. I held back the a scream and my eyes watered. "Geez, this tail sure does weigh a lot."

I rolled my eyes, trying to cover up how much pain I was in "Oh please. You can do it."

He tried again, but failed to lift me out "You know what, I am going to go get Lewis."

"What... Zane no! Don't leave me here!" I yelled out, but he was already inside the Sertori's house.

I sighed and nervously looked around, hoping no one was nearby. I had the blue tarp covering me but I still felt weird just laying there.

A minute later Zane, Lewis, and Cleo came running out.

"Rikki! Rikki are you okay?" Lewis asked.

"Nope." I answered.

"Right. Nevermind that was a dumb question." Lewis said.

"Yep." I said.

"Can you guys get me out of here already?" I asked.

Lewis and Zane reached down and began to pull me out. I gasped in pain as they did so. I wrapped my arms around Zane's neck and Lewis held up my tail. Cleo just stood back with her arms crossed.

"Rikki? Does this hurt?" Lewis asked.

"Yes Lewis. It hurts very much. Could we just get inside please?"

"Uh, Cleo? A little help here? Could you open the door?" Lewis asked.

"Oh! Right." Cleo said as she ran up and opened the door for us.

We made it inside and Lewis and Zane set me down on the couch.

"Okay, Zane told us what happened. Now let me see if I can do anything about it." Lewis said as he pulled the tarp off of me. He gasped "Oh... that doesn't look right."

"You think?" I asked sarcastically.

"So? Can you fix it?" Zane asked.

"Well, I don't know. We need to have it x-rayed to see if it really is broken-"

"Of course it is broken! Any dummy could see that." I said.

"But we need to see exactly where it is broken-"

"Right here! It is broken right there where it bends." I said, pointing to the spot where it twisted unnaturally.

"Rikki, I am not a doctor. I don't really know what to do." Lewis sighed.

"Well we can't go to a real doctor!" I said.

Cleo stood back, leaning against the wall with a mix of fear and disgust on her face.

"No, no we can't do that." Lewis said.

"Why not? If a real doctor knows what to do, then it would be better than forever being stuck as a mermaid who can't swim." Zane said.

"Uh-uh. No way am I going to have a broken bone reveal our secret." I said.

"Rikki, what else can we do?" Zane said.

"I will be right back. Cleo, can I use your computer?" Lewis asked.

"Uh, sure. Go ahead." Cleo said.

Lewis ran off and we could hear him typing away in the next room. Fifteen minutes later he came back with a stack of papers that he had printed out.

"Okay, I have done research on broken bones, fish bones, how to fix them, how to make a homemade cast, and much much more. That, combined with my previous knowledge makes me an official mermaid doctor." Lewis said.

"Oh please. You are now a certified doctor after reading some junk online that is probably not true?" I asked.

"Yes, yes I am. I think I am qualified to fix this now." Lewis boasted.

"Okay doctor. Then fix it." I said.

"Well, first I think we should disinfect it. Cleo, do you have a first aid kit?"

"We have one upstairs. I'll go get it." Cleo said as she quickly turned and ran up the stairs, seeming rather eager to get away.

"Zane, here is a list of stuff I will need. Could you go get everything on this list?" Lewis asked.

Zane took the paper and looked at it as he nodded his head "Sure, I will be right back. Hey! Can I borrow your truck?"

"Why? And it's not my truck, it is my brother's. "

"It is a long ways to get these things. And It would be much faster if I could drive." Zane smiled.

"Arg. Fine, here." Lewis said as he tossed Zane his keys. "But be careful! I don't want a scratch on it. My brother would kill me if his truck was damaged in any way."

"Got it. Thanks Lewis!" Zane said as he ran out the door.

I watched Lewis as he paced around the room, mumbling things to himself. I hoped he wasn't worried about my injury. If Lewis can't fix it ... I don't even want to think about it. I really don't know

what we will do if Lewis can't fix this.

****AN: Sooo... what did you think? TELL ME WHAT YOU THINK. I DON'T CARE IF YOU ONLY TYPE ONE WORD, JUST REVIEW. I MEAN IT!****

7. Chapter 7

****AN: Wow. I am really sorry that I haven't updated in a while. Major writers block. ****

****Thank you guys for all the wonderful reviews! It means so much to me when you take the time to review. ****

****I don't own anything. All characters and stuff belong to other people who aren't me. I am just borrowing them. :)****

****Anyways, here is the next chapter. I hope you like it!****

I felt guilty. I don't why, but I did. I felt like it was somehow my fault that Sophie found out about us. And I felt like I had to fix it.

But how? This really did seem like an unfixable problem. I couldn't talk her out of it. She was too stubborn for that. But what if I could offer her something better?

But what? She already knows about us. What could be better than knowing about us and having the power to expose us?

Maybe I could offer her a mermaid who is willing to do whatever she wants. Show off my powers to the public, give scale samples to marine biologists, swim around for people to see.

Would it work? Would she take one willing mermaid over four mermaids in hiding?

Or would it backfire. Would she decide that it isn't enough? That after she is done using me she would expose the others anyways?

It might still be worth a shot. If I could keep the attention on me and away from the other girls then maybe they could keep living a normal life. Well, as normal as it gets for a mermaid anyways.

I could ride the wave of fame and let people get used to the idea of mermaids. And then in the end, if Sophie decides it isn't enough, the others won't have to be constantly bombarded by the press and by curious scientists.

Then again, a mermaid is a mermaid. Old news or not.

I decided to do it. To offer myself to Sophie in exchange to keep the others out of it.

It would probably be only a matter of time before the public figures out that the other girls are mermaids too. Or until Sophie tells them. But if she is going to expose us all anyways then a little extra time for them to remain hidden would be nice.

I wouldn't tell the others what I was doing. They would only try to

talk me out of it. They would tell me that we are all in this together. Which is a nice thought, but it is better to have just me in the public's eye than all of us.

So I began to make my way over to Will's place. I assumed that is where Sophie would be. As I walked closer and closer to Will's familiar blue boat shed I got more and more nervous.

Should I change my mind? It isn't too late. I could turn around and-

"Bella?" I heard Sophie ask. I spun around and there she was, walking up behind with her arms full of groceries.

"H-hi." I stuttered out. Ooh... what have I done? I can't turn back now. Does she know that I know that she knows we are mermaids? Oh my, that is confusing.

Should I just play dumb and pretend I don't know that she knows?

"Um, hello. Would you like to come inside?" she said. She was probably just as confused as I was.

"Uh, yeah sure." I said. What am I doing! This could all just be a trap!

She walked up to the door and I followed behind her. I watched her as she fumbled with her keys for a minute until she found the right one. We walked inside and she began to put the groceries she bought in the fridge.

I stood there awkwardly. "Would you like something to drink?" Sophie asked as she got herself a bottle of water.

"No, thanks." I said. "Where is Will?" I asked.

"Did you come here to see him?"

"No, I-"

"Well that's good because he isn't here."

"Oh."

"So you came here to see me."

"Well..."

"Well you did, right? If you didn't come here to see Will then you must have been looking for me."

"Yeah, I guess I did."

She just looked at me expectantly, waiting for me to say something. How do I start this conversation?

After a minute of awkward silence she walked over and dumped the rest of the water in bottle she had been drinking onto my head.

My eyes bugged out and I tried to run out of there, but I was so nervous that I couldn't see where I was going. I tripped and fell onto the floor.

The change took place right before her eyes. She smiled and shook her head.

"Wow. This is amazing." she said as she bent down and felt my scales.

I was frozen. Paralized with fear. What have I done?

"Y-you can't tell anyone." I stuttered.

She scoffed "Well I am going to."

"No! Please..."

"Why shouldn't I?"

"Uhh..."

She raise her eyebrow and looked at me.

"Just expose me. Not the other girls. Please."

"But why? Why would I do that when I could expose all of you?"

"J-just expose me and I will go along with whatever you want me to do. If you expose all of us we will just spend our time hiding and running away from the attention."

She sat there for a moment, thinking about what she should do. "That is a good point. You would do anything I wanted you to do?"

"Y-yes. Pretty much anything."

She nodded her head "Okay. You have yourself a deal."

I was slightly surprised that she agreed so quickly. And I was also suspicious. She probably had a plan that I wasn't aware of. Oh well. I guess the best thing to do is to just go along with it.

"Could you hand me a towel?" I asked.

She nodded and stood up. I watched her as she walked over to a cabinet and grabbed out a hand towel.

"Here." she said as she tossed it to me. I quickly dried off, anxious to get out of there.

"So, when do we... uh, start?" I asked quietly and nervously.

Sophie shrugged her shoulders. "I hadn't really thought that far ahead. Tomorrow, I guess. The sooner the better."

I weakly nodded my head. This was baaad idea. What have I done?

*****Rikki's Point of View*****

"Oooowww! Lewis... That hurts! OOOWW! Be careful!" I whined.

"I am being careful." Lewis said calmly.

"Well be more careful!" I shouted.

I was sprawled out on Cleo's couch, still in mermaid form, as Lewis tried to figure out exactly what was wrong with my tail. Cleo and Zane stood back and out of the way with equal looks of disgust on thier faces.

"I have come to the conclusion that only these few bones are broken." Lewis said after poking and proding my tail for fifteen minutes.

"Is that good?" I asked.

"Very good. It will heal much faster and the sooner you heal the sooner you can change back... I hope." he said, adding the last part very quietly.

"So, what do we need to do?" I asked, pretending I didn't hear that last part.

"Well, I guess we should put the cast on it. Zane, could you hand me the bag of stuff you got at the store?" Lewis asked.

Zane nodded his head and grabbed the bag of stuff. "Here." he said as he tossed Lewis the bag.

Lewis pulled out a tube of stuff squirted some onto my tail. "LEWIS!" I shreiked out in pain after the stuff from the tube had a chance to sink in. I felt a stinging feeling all over the cuts and scrapes.

"What is that stuff!" I said as I gritted my teeth.

"It is just antiseptic stuff to help kill all of the germs. Does it sting?"

I sucked in a breath of air through my teeth as I nodded my head.

"Good, that means it is working." Lewis said.

He quickly moved on and began to open up more stuff. He pulled out one thing that looked sort of like those masks that doctors put over their mouths when they are about to go in to surgery.

"Lewis, just because you are doing doctorish stuff doesn't mean you have to wear a costume." I said, rolling my eyes.

"Actually, this is for you." he said as he pulled the mask over my nose and mouth.

"Wait, what? For me? Why do I need that?" I said as I tried to push him away. It didn't do much good and I ended up with the mask securely on my face.

A sour smell filled my nose and mouth. It was very mediciney but had the distinct smell of vinegar.

"Lewis? What is..." I asked but suddenly I couldn't finish my sentence and I began to feel tired. Black spots filled my eyes and all I wanted to do was go to sleep.

"That is to knock you out while I work on your tail. It will be much easier without having you looking over my shoulder and making some sarcastic remark every few minutes. Plus it means you won't feel anything."

I reached up to pull the mask off, not liking the idea of being unconscious. Except I couldn't seem to get my arm up to my face because I was so tired.

"Lewis... You are... going to pay for this later..." I said as I tried to keep my eyes open. I simply couldn't. I didn't want to, but ended up shutting my eyes and falling asleep.

I was sitting at a table. It was a very nice table, glass on top with an iron base that had little designs carved into it like grapes and leaves. It was small and round and it only seated two people.

Zane was sitting across from me, sipping something out of a fancy looking mug. There were trees all around us and over us, providing plenty of shade.

We appeared to be at a very fancy looking cafe. The rich smell of coffee filled the air around me, although a slight breeze pulled it away from me and replaced it with the briny smell of the sea before I could really let it sink in.

I looked behind me and sure enough there was the ocean. We were up on a cliff looking out over the sea. The cliff had a steep drop and down below the waves crashed against the rocky shore.

There was a few other tables around us with people seated at them. It seemed very peaceful and relaxing here but something didn't quite seem right.

Zane looked up and started talking. It looked like he was asking me something but... I couldn't hear anything. I watched his lips move but no sound came out. I looked at him and shook my head.

"I can't hear you. Could you say that again?" I asked.

I watched again as his lips moved but no sound came out. I shook my head and looked around at everyone else.

I watched two older men at the next table over as they seemed to have a very heated discussion. I strained as hard as I could to hear something but it was as if the volume had been muted.

I glanced at the other table beside me and watched as three girls about my age talked and giggled. They were hunched over the table and looked like they were talking very quietly. But then again, I wouldn't know.

I took a second to think about this and realized what everyone was

wearing. It was so strange.

The men were all wearing suits, which wasn't that strange I suppose. But their hair looked like it was all slicked back. Most of them had little tiny mustaches too.

The women all were wearing very glamorous dresses with long skirts and they had long gloves that came up to thier elbows. They looked very... old fashioned. Like something out of 'I Love Lucy'.

Yes! That was exactly it. Everyone seemed to be wearing clothes from fifties. But why?

I looked down at myself and realized I too seemed to be in costume. I was wearing a shimmery pale pink dress that had a rather low v-neck.

It was sleeveless and came down several inches past my knees. The skirt was very flowy looking and seemed to have several layers of fabric underneath it to make it fuller.

I had a fur wrap draped around my shoulders. It was pale, almost white but not quite. I didn't want to think to much about what kind of animal it might be. It looked very expensive though.

I was wearing long gloves that came up to my elbows. They too looked very expensive.

I tentatively reached a hand up to my hair. It was all piled up onto the top of my head some how with a few loose curls hanging down.

My hand flew to my neck to find my locket, but instead I found a few strings of pearls.

What was going on?

"Zane, what is going on here? Where are we?" I asked. I realized that Zane was wearing a suit like everyone else, although besides that he looked like usual.

Zane looked at me for a moment like I had asked the strangest question. He then laughed and shook his head, followed by him moving his lips again but no sound coming out.

I sighed and slumped down in my seat. Suddenly I felt someone tap lightly on my shoulder. I spun around and looked at the three girls who had been sitting at the table next to ours.

One of the girls was a bit taller and had brown hair. The other two had blond hair and were standing at her side. They were all wearing the same kind of clothing I was.

They looked very familiar but I just couldn't remember who they were.

"Hello Rikki." said one of the blond girls who was dressed in white. The girl next to her with brown hair was in light blue and the other blond girl was wearing red.

I was surprised that I could hear them. "Um, hello. Do I know you?" I

asked.

"Yes, in fact you do know me. My name is Louise, and these are my friends Julia and Gracie."

I looked at her neck and sure enough there was Emma's locket.

"Miss Chatham? Wha- but how? I don't understand..." I mumbled.

"Your dreaming. Duh." said Julia.

"Julia!" Gracie said as she slapped Julia's arm.

Julia rolled her eyes and crossed her arms.

"Oh. So you guys aren't real?" I asked, almost disappointed.

"We are here to warn you that danger is coming." Louise said in the same annoyingly mystic voice she has used before.

"Yeah, I know. Lots of danger, coming my way. I already know." I said.

"There is someone coming who may reveal your secret." she said.

"Yep. Already know. Aren't you a little late with this message?" I asked.

"I told her you knew already but she insisted on coming." Julia said, clearly annoyed.

"Julia! Be nice." Gracie said.

Zane stood up and reached his hand out to help me stand up. "Come on Rikki, time to wake up." he said.

"Oh, now you decide to talk." I mumbled as I took his hand.

"Rikki, it is time to wake up." he said again.

"I heard you the first time!" I said and then suddenly I was back on the couch at Cleo's house with Zane huddled over me.

"Geez, okay. Sorry." he said as he stood up and raised his arms in front of him in mock defense.

I rubbed my eyes and looked around. That was the most realistic dream I have ever had.

I looked down at my tail and saw that most of it was in a cast. Great. "How am I supposed to get around? Do I just have to sit here until it heals?" I asked.

"Well actually..." Lewis said as Cleo walked into the room pushing a wheelchair.

"A wheelchair?" I asked.

"Yep! A wheelchair." Lewis said.

"Do you think that will work?" I asked.

"I don't see why not. We can just get a blanket to cover up your tail and you should be fine." Cleo said.

"Isn't it a bit... risky?" I asked.

"Well would you like to just sit here until your broken bones heal?" Zane asked me.

"No, I guess not." I said with a sigh.

"Well, then wheelchair it is." Zane said.

I was still feeling a bit groggy from being asleep. That was one strange dream. I doubt it actually meant anything. I mean, what could it have meant?

Unless that really was Gracie, Julia, and Louise. It could be them trying to warn me... no. I don't believe in spirits or ghosts or anything like that. Besides, Miss Chatham isn't dead, so they couldn't have been ghosts.

But still, they were a bit late with the message. It was probably just a meaningless dream. Just me worrying about Sophie and Will and being exposed and - stop! I have to stop that. It is stressing me out thinking about all that stuff.

"Lewis, how long will it take for me to heal?" I asked.

"Oh, I don't know. Anywhere from four to six weeks." he responded.

"What! Four to six weeks? I was thinking more like a week or two." I said.

"Rikki, you broke several bones. It takes a while for them to heal. Four to six weeks in humans. Who knows how long it will take for you to heal. I don't know if the bones in your tail are as strong as human bones or if they are more fragile like fish bones. I guess we will have to find out. And also, you're a mermaid. For all we know you have advanced healing powers." Lewis said jokingly.

I rolled my eyes "Really Lewis? Advanced healing powers? Isn't that a bit far fetched?"

"You never know. Isn't the idea of being a mermaid a bit far fetched?" Lewis said with a shrug as he packed up all of his doctor stuff.

"Well..." I trailed off. He was right. I mean really, who knew what else was out there? If mermaids are real, who is to say vampires aren't? Fairies? Unicorns? Uh... nevermind. I think I still might be a bit loopy from the sleeping gas.

8. Chapter 8

****AN:** Okay, well here it is. The next chapter of Exposed! Wooh! Sorry

for the wait.**

**I would like to dedicate this chapter to Colemet D. Kickshrub. She has been such a great source of encouragement for me and without her I kind of doubt that this story would be as good as it is. (At least I hope it is good.) **

Also, you guys should read her H2O story called Keeping Secrets. She just finished it and it is really great. So as soon as you finish this awesome chapter go and check it out. :)

I know that the moon pool was destroyed in the last episode of H2O but I like it too much for it to be gone. So in my story it has been magically brought back. :P So yeah, just go with the flow of it. Sorry for any confusion.

Also, I know that their mermaid tails are really long and most likely wouldn't fit in a wheelchair BUT in season one episode seven at Emma's dad's birthday party when she gets moonstruck Lewis comes with her grandmothers wheelchair and wheels her away. So... it worked there and that is why I think it can work here. Yep. So again, just go with the flow. :D

"Okay Bella, I think we should make it look like an accident that you have been exposed." Sophie said.

We were sitting on Will's couch in his boat shed discussing how I should be exposed. I was sweaty and shaking because I was so nervous. I couldn't even imagine telling everyone my secret that I had kept for almost half of my life.

"W-why should we make it look like an accident?" I asked.

"Because if we tell the press to just show up somewhere and we show them that you are a mermaid, wouldn't they be a bit suspicious that it is a hoax or something?" Sophie said. I hadn't even really thought of that. I just assumed that they would believe whatever we show them.

"Oh. Yeah I guess you are right." I mumbled. Actually, that would be great if everyone just dismissed it as a hoax.

"So I was thinking that maybe we could spill some juice on you at the cafe or have someone throw a wet beach ball at you at the beach. Something like that. And of course we could have some people waiting around with cameras, ready to take pictures and videos." she said rather cheerfully. Although I guess she wouldn't have any reason not to be cheerful. She was about to become a millionaire.

I just nodded, deep in thought.

"Hello? Bella, are you even listening to me?" Sophie asked annoyed. It snapped me out of my thoughts I quickly looked up.

"Yeah, I'm listening." I said glumly.

"So anyway, like I was saying I think we should make it look like an accident. What is your opinion?" She asked me.

I opened my mouth to say something rude back at her or make some

snappy comeback, but just before I did I realized that I couldn't. If I said anything at all that made her mad, she could easily call off the whole thing and expose us all.

"Beach ball." I said, followed by a sigh.

"Good choice, I like that one the best too. So I was thinking tomorrow. The weather is supposed to be nice. We wouldn't want bad weather, it might mess up the pictures." she said.

I was about to roll my eyes but caught myself and simply nodded my head instead.

"And I am going to be your best friend okay?" she said.

"Wait, what?" I said, confused.

"For the press, I am going to pretend to be your best friend. We will say that I have always known your secret. I can sell more interviews that way than if I was just some random stranger who didn't know any more than anyone else."

"Oh. Right."

"And Will... I was thinking he could be your boyfriend. How do you feel about that?"

"No! No way. It ended very badly. I don't want to get back together with him."

"It would just be for the publicity. You know how the public practically eats up a good love story. We come up with something romantic about how he found about your secret."

"Sophie, I said no. I don't even want to see Will ever again."

"Fine. Then the deal is off. Leave. I will find some way to expose you and all of friends by myself."

"Wait! Sophie you can't do that."

"Why not? What is stopping me?"

"I'm sorry. I will go along with whatever you want. Just please don't expose my friends!"

"Well... okay. But you have to go along with everything I say. No more outbursts like that. You will be Will's girlfriend for the publicity. Do you understand?"

I quickly nodded my head, to stunned to speak.

*****The Next Day*****

I nervously walked onto the beach, right next to Sophie. She had a determined look on her face. I was trying hard to not to look like I had just seen a ghost.

The sky was clear and blue and the sun beat down on us. I felt hot

and sweaty, partially from the heat and partially from the nerves. My hair stuck to my face and to the back of my neck and my feet were burning from the hot sand.

The water crashing against the shore looked so cool and inviting. An instant escape from it all. I actually thought about it for a moment, running off into the waves and swimming away before my secret could be exposed.

I quickly realised that it was not possible. Running away now wouldn't help, it would only make things worse. I am going to be exposed, no matter what. It is just an option of whether I am exposed with the other girls or by myself.

"Okay, so I was thinking you could just be sitting right here," Sophie said as she spread out a towel, "and I will be sitting here with you. I got some of my friends to help," she pointed over towards a group of people, two girls and two guys, who were tossing a beach ball back and forth.

"I told them the plan and I told them to have their cameras ready but I didn't tell them you are a mermaid. I wouldn't want one of them running off and telling the press before I have a chance to take all the credit." she said as she sat down next to me on the towel.

"Uh, Sophie? How exactly does this all benefit you? I mean, all these people are around to take pictures and stuff, won't they be getting the money by selling the pictures?" I asked.

"They will get some money, obviously, but I will become a millionaire because as far as the public knows, I am your best friend. I will be able to book a bunch of interviews with people who will want to talk the only person who knows everything about you." she said with a smile.

I just nodded and sighed as I prepared for the madness to start. No matter how much I wished I could get up and run into the sea, there is no backing out now.

"Okay, I think we are just about ready to start. Are you ready Bella?" Sophie asked.

I looked around me at the crowded beach. I took in a deep breath and said "As ready as I'll ever be."

She nodded at me and then turned and nodded to her friends. I watched as her friends laughed and tossed the beach ball to each other. One of them purposely hit it into the waves and then ran after it.

The guy who ran out into the waves to get the ball came running back out of the water carrying a soaking wet ball. "Hey Bella! Catch!" he called out as he threw the ball towards me.

My eyes widened and I froze up in terror. I watched as the ball came hurtling towards me. I raised my hands up, shielding me from it. I don't why, it wouldn't protect from what was about to come, but I did it anyways.

The ball hit my hands and got them wet. Even though it was only a few drops of water, it was enough to signal the transformation. I could

feel the familiar tingle as my legs prepared to morph and stretch into my long golden tail.

"Oh my gosh! Bella, we need to get you out of here!" I heard Sophie call out loudly, although I obviously knew that she was just putting on an act.

Many people on the beach turned to stare as they heard Sophie very loud outburst. I cringed, knowing that any second now everyone would be staring at me.

And then it happened, my legs turning into my beautiful tail. There was a moment of freedom, knowing that with just one flick of my fin I could travel faster than any creature. But it quickly vanished as I remembered once again where I was.

I heard several shrieks and many screams. Loud, excited voices quickly invaded my personal space. I was trapped on the ground, unable to move as everyone on the beach suddenly surrounded me.

Camera flashes blinded me. I was finding it hard to breathe. People were firing questions at me but it was like I wasn't even there. I stared blankly ahead of me, too frightened to move or speak.

After what seemed like hours but I'm sure was only minutes the sun dried off the few drops of water that had landed on me and my tail morphed back into legs. As soon as I realized I had changed back, I stood up quickly and ran away from everyone who was surrounding me.

I pushed my way through the crowd, trying desperately to reach the ocean. People were grabbing at my arms and pulling on my hair, trying to get me to stop. I moved quickly though, and somehow made it through the crowd.

I ran into the waves and once again transformed into a mermaid. A feeling of relief washed over me and I felt momentarily safe, even though I was far from it. I torpedoed away from the shore and off to Mako.

*****Cleo's Point of View*****

"Mermaid found at a local beach. A young girl who bystanders describe as about eighteen, tan, and with sandy blond hair was seen transforming right before their eyes into something that before today everyone thought was a mythical creature.

Pictures and shaky videos were taken of the incident. So what do you think? Is it a hoax or is this actually a mermaid? Leave your comment on our Bookface page.

In other news sports stars are lining up for the annual..."

I flipped the channel to the next news station.

"I am standing here on the very beach where the teenage girl known as Bella Hartley morphed into a mermaid, changed back into a human, and then was seen running off into the waves..."

Click.

"So Sophie, what is your opinion on all of this?"

"Well, me and Bella have been best friends ever since we were kids and I have known her secret for almost as long as I have known her."

"Wow, and was it hard for you to keep such a huge secret?"

"I am not going to be answering any more questions at this time. If you would like to book an interview with me you may call me at 888-8888."

I finally just turned the T.V. off.

"It is on every news channel." I said numbly.

Rikki just shook her head. I was sitting on the floor next to Lewis, leaning against the couch with Rikki sprawled out on the cushions above us. Zane was sitting in a chair with his feet propped up on the coffee table.

"How did this happen?" Lewis asked.

"We have always been so careful..." I mumbled.

"I highly doubt this was an accident. I'm sure Sophie is behind all of this. There is no way she just happened to be there. She will probably be going for you guys next." Zane muttered.

"But why wouldn't she expose us when we are all together?" Rikki asked.

"I don't know. I'm sure she has some sort of plan." Zane said.

"Well we knew it was coming sooner or later." Lewis said.

"Yeah, but I just thought it would be later." I sighed.

Everyone just sort of nodded in agreement, too lost in their own thoughts to say much of anything.

"We should call Emma." I said.

"I'm sure she already knows." Rikki said.

"Still, we haven't talked to her in a while. She doesn't even know your injured." I said.

Rikki sighed and nodded her head.

"Yeah, your right. But you do it. I don't like being the bringer of bad news." Rikki said.

"No thanks. I don't like telling people bad news any more than you do." I said.

"Fine, I'll do it." Lewis said in an annoyed voice as he stood up and headed towards the phone.

Lewis grabbed the phone off the counter and headed through the kitchen and onto the hallway to make the call. I could hear him saying things but couldn't quite make out what he was saying.

"So what do we do now?" Rikki asked.

"I'm going to head out to Mako." I said.

"What? Cleo, no. You can't! It is way to dangerous." Zane said.

"I have a feeling that is where Bella swam off to. She is probably pretty shaken up. I'm going to go out there and bring her back." I said.

"She is right Zane. I know it is beyond dangerous but it is even more dangerous for Bella to be out there alone in the condition she is most likely in." Rikki said.

Zane sighed and shook his head "Just hurry, okay?"

"I will. I'll be back as soon as I can." I said as I stood up and quickly walked towards the back door before Zane changed his mind and tried to stop me.

I hurried past Lewis in the hallway before he could ask where I was going because I knew he would be totally against it.

I walked out the back door and dove into the canal. As soon as my legs had morphed into my tail, I sped off in the direction of Mako island.

I slowed down as I neared the entrance to the moon pool. I swam through the underwater tunnel and surfaced into the familiar, almost eerie blue pool.

As soon as my head was out of the water the sound of Bella's shaky sobs filled my ears. She had her arms resting against the rocks on the edge of the pool with her head laying on her arms.

I looked at her for a moment in shock. I had never seen Bella so broken down before. In fact, I had never even seen her cry.

I swam over to her and wrapped my arms around her as she continued to sob. Her eyes were rimmed with red and her face was covered in tears.

"Shh... Bella, it will be okay. It will all be okay." I said, trying to comfort Bella but at the same time trying to convince myself.

I reached out and swept aside some locks of hair that was sticking to her face.

"T-they know, Cleo. Everyone k-knows." Bella choked out.

I just nodded and hugged her tighter.

We floated there for a solid fifteen minutes before Bella finally stopped crying. She ducked under the water and washed away the tears. She came back up out of the water and smoothed her hair back. Her

eyes were still lined with red but she looked much better than she did when I first came in.

She seemed a bit calmer now but still not too stable.

"Do you feel better?" I asked cautiously.

Bella nodded her head but didn't say anything.

"We should probably head back now. I don't want them to worry about us." I said.

"Okay." Bella said weakly.

She was still facing down and wouldn't look me in the eye. I couldn't really blame her. She must be traumatized.

I reached out and took her hand and then led her out of the pool. We swam slowly, hand in hand, back towards the canal in the back of my house.

"We're back." I called out as I walked in the back door to my house with my arm draped around Bella's shoulders.

"Cleo! We were starting to get worried about you. It is almost dark." Lewis said as he came running towards us.

"Well I didn't think it was going to take that long." I said.

Bella continued to not say anything and just stared down at the ground.

"Um, I think I am going to take Bella upstairs and let her get some rest." I said.

"Good idea. She doesn't look too good." Lewis said. I shot a glare at him but fortunatley Bella didn't even seem to be hearing anything we were saying.

I led her upstairs and into my room. It was a bit of a struggle to get her up the stairs but somehow I managed.

We stumbled into my room and I flicked the lights on.

"Okay Bella. I think you just need a good long rest and then you will be all better in the morning." I said as cheerfully as I could as I made her sit down on the bed.

I pulled off her shoes and pulled back the covers on my bed. As I tucked her in she still didn't even seem to be responding. I sighed and shook my head.

"Oh Bella, what are we going to do?" I whispered to myself as I leaned against the door frame to my room.

I sighed again and turned the lights off. I turned to walk out and gently shut my door behind me.

Waiting for me in the hallway was Lewis.

"Hi." I said tiredly.

"How are you holding up?" Lewis asked.

"Not so good." I said.

He reached out and pulled me into a hug. I relaxed and leaned into him as he reassuringly rubbed my back.

"Lewis, I'm so scared. I was trying to be strong for Bella but it is hard. I am sure I will be exposed soon too and I just can't imagine everyone knowing our secret. What are we going to do Lewis?" I said as a few tears rolled down my cheeks.

"Come on Cleo, don't cry," he said as he wiped the tears from my face with his thumb.

"We will all get through this together. You girls are strong, you can do this. Everything really will be okay." Lewis said.

"Thank you Lewis, for everything. You have always been there for us, and for me. If you say everything will be alright then I trust you." I said as I pulled away from.

I felt much better already and I really did believe that everything would be alright.

9. Chapter 9

****AN: Here it is, chapter nine of Exposed. Enjoy! ****

*******Bella's Point of View*******

People were surrounding me.

People were touching my tail.

People were shouting things at me that I couldn't understand.

I couldn't even breath.

I felt so clausterphobic.

Bright camera flashes blinded me.

I was helpless.

Completely and utterly helpless.

And scared.

I was so scared.

I was trapped.

With no way out.

No one there to help me.

All alone, yet surrounded by people.

I sat up in my bed suddenly, covered in sweat. My hair was sticking to my face and the sheets were tangled up around me.

I breathed a sigh of relief as I realized that it was only a dream. It felt so realistic. But it didn't really happen. I was safe and no one knew my sec-

Wait, where am I?

I looked around confused for a moment before I realized that I was in Cleo's room. And then everything came rushing back to me.

The events of the day before, everyone finding out, me swimming off to Mako Island, Cleo bringing me back- it all happened. It wasn't a dream, everyone really knew.

I looked down at the oversized t-shirt I was wearing. Cleo must have given me this to change into. I really couldn't remember much of the night before.

I sighed and plopped back down onto the bed. Maybe if I just went back to sleep it would all go away.

I tried for a about fifteen minutes to go back to sleep but I just couldn't. I was awake now and I might as well get up and face what was to come. No matter how scared I was I had to do it sooner or later.

I walked down the stairs and into Cleo's living room to find Rikki sprawled out on the couch- as a mermaid?- snoring loudly. Zane was asleep on the floor next to the couch and Cleo and Lewis were in the kitchen making breakfast.

I figured I didn't look my best but I didn't feel so bad once I saw Cleo. Her hair was very bed-headish and she was wearing a faded, stained, and torn purple tank top with oversized faded blue plaid pajama pants. She clearly didn't bother to do any sort of getting ready.

Lewis wasn't any better. He had dark circles under his eyes and his hair looked like a bird's nest. He was wearing some very over sized pajama pants that he most likely borrowed from Cleo's dad and a white t-shirt.

They looked like zombies as they wandered around the kitchen and tried to piece together something to eat.

I cleared my throat and they both looked over at me.

"Oh, hi Bella. Did you sleep okay?" Cleo asked tiredly.

"Well, no. Bad dreams. What about you guys?" I asked.

"I didn't get much sleep at all. I spent almost all night worrying." Cleo said, followed by a yawn.

Lewis nodded "About the same," he mumbled.

"Coffee?" Cleo asked as she got some mugs out of the cupboard.

"Sure." I nodded.

I watched Cleo as she shakily poured coffee into five mugs.

"Here." she said as she handed me one.

"Thanks." I said quietly as I took the hot mug.

"So, what is up with Rikki?" I asked.

"What about her?" Cleo asked as she yawned again.

"Well, she is a mermaid." I said.

"Duh, we all are- oh. You mean right now. Got it. Sorry, I am a bit tired. She got hurt and I guess we can't change back when we're hurt. I don't really know the specifics of it. Ask Lewis." she said tiredly without much interest.

"Oh. Ok." I said.

I was actually really interested in this. We never knew we couldn't change back into humans if we got hurt when we were mermaids. I wondered if it works the other way around too. If we got hurt as humans, could we change into mermaids? How big did the injury have to be to make it count?

I thought about asking Lewis, but he could barely hold his coffee mug, much less a conversation.

"Why are we all here? I mean thanks for letting me stay here, I was a mess last night, but what about Lewis, Zane, and Rikki?" I asked.

"I heard my name. What about me?" Rikki said as she sat up and yawned. Suddenly she lost balance and toppled off the couch and right on top of Zane.

"Ah!" Rikki shrieked as she fell.

"Ahggg. Rikki get off of me." Zane moaned.

"I would if I could bubble brains." Rikki snapped.

"Me? Bubble brains? Excuse me but you were the one who got your tail stuck in the door of a sunken ship, somehow." Zane retorted.

"Yeah, well... I don't really have a comeback for that one. But I'm sure it was your fault somehow." Rikki said defiantly.

Zane just shook his head and chuckled "You can be so immature sometimes."

Rikki huffed and tried to roll off Zane. I looked at them from where I was standing at the counter sipping my coffee and grinned as they bickered back and forth.

"I'm stuck." she said.

"Well, then I'm stuck too." Zane sighed.

"Guys? A little help?" Rikki called out.

"I'm too tired for this." Cleo shook her head as she picked up her coffee and went to sit on the chair near the couch.

Lewis sighed and walked over to help Zane and Rikki. Him and Zane worked together to lift Rikki back up onto the couch. As soon as she was up and sprawled out taking up the whole couch again I walked over and sat down on the floor next the couch.

Rikki sat up a little bit and Zane sat down on the couch. Once he was sitting Rikki laid back down and put her head in his lap. Lewis went over and sat down on the floor next to the chair Cleo was sitting in.

"So, why are we all here again?" I asked now that we were all settled down.

Cleo shrugged "I don't know. Rikki can't really go home like this. I doubt she would be able to keep it from her dad that long considering they live together in such a small space. Um, Lewis and Zane were tired and we were all here really late last night talking about how things are going to go after this, with your secret being out and everything. It is only a matter of time before Sophie comes after us too."

"Actually, Sophie won't be trying to expose you guys." I said.

"What? What are you talking about?" Cleo asked as she shook her head. Even Lewis looked up and seemed to suddenly be listening.

"Well... I sort of... made a deal with her." I said quietly.

"Bella? What do you mean? What kind of a deal?" Cleo asked.

"I was working with her. We planned that, how I got exposed on the beach. I told her I would go along with whatever she wanted as long as she didn't expose you guys." I said sheepishly.

"What!" everyone seemed to shout at the same time.

"Bella! We are all in this thing together. This is our secret." Cleo said.

"It works out better this way! If I am going to be exposed anyway then, if we can help it, why should you guys be exposed too? I know that it seems like good support to have us all be exposed together, but I still have you to support me. Just, not in the view of the public." I said.

"She's right." Zane said.

"Zane!" Rikki shouted.

"What? If you think about it, she really is going to be exposed no matter what. You guys are free now. We should be grateful to Bella

for what she did but it is pointless for you guys all to be exposed. We are all still here to help. I'm sure Lewis agree's with me. Right Lewis?" Zane said.

Lewis nodded his head "Yeah, I agree."

"Well..." Cleo said.

"What she means to say is 'Thank you!'" Lewis said.

"I just don't feel right about this." Cleo said.

"Me either." Rikki said.

"It doesn't seem fair." Cleo said.

"Look, you guys have been great friends to me. And I want to do whatever I can to make life a bit easier for you. You guys will be exposed eventually, there is no doubt in my mind that you won't, but in the mean time just think of it as a gift." I said.

"Thank you. You still should have talked to us about it first, but thank you." Cleo said.

"Yeah, thanks Bella. I owe you one. Or ten. Or a hundred. Wow, I am in like, major debt to you now aren't I?" Rikki said.

I laughed and shook my head "No. Don't think of it like that. No debt for anyone. We are all completely debt free." I said.

"Well... you still owe me twenty dollars from last week..." Rikki said.

"Debt free! All the way around!" I said quickly with a smile.

We all laughed and for a moment everything felt all right. I was just sitting here, like normal, laughing with my friends. But then I rememered that nothing would be normal from now on, not for me anyway. Actually, not for any of us.

"So, how much damage is there? Why aren't there reporters knocking on your door right now?" I asked.

"Well, I doubt they know you're here. It is on every news station though." Cleo said.

"Really? Every news station?" I asked.

"Oh yeah. Every single news station. Or at least it was yesterday." Rikki said.

"Maybe it has died down by now." I said hopefully.

"I doubt it. There is evidence out there that mermaids really do exist. They aren't going to be forgetting it anytime soon." Cleo said.

"Well, why don't you check just to see. You never know." I said.

Cleo sighed as she reached for the remote and turned the T.V. on.

"Una sirena se encontrÃ³ ayer por la tarde en una playa en Australia. El nombre de la chica se dice que es Bella Hartley. Una entrevista con su mejor amiga Sophie Benjamin se darÃ¡; a conocer esta noche por primera vez. Esperemos que pronto podamos conseguir una entrevista con la sirena."

I watched in shock as they showed pictures of me that I have no idea how they got.

Cleo turned it to the next channel and once again there was a news story about me. Station after station there was a news story about me. It was all that was on T.V. I almost felt bad for the people who actually wanted to watch a show because even on the regular channels there was breaking news stories about me.

"Oh." I said quietly after Cleo turned the T.V. off.

"I told you so." Rikki said.

Suddenly the phone began to ring and Cleo stood up to answer it.

"Should I answer it?" Cleo asked just before she pressed the button.

"Sure. I don't see any harm in it. Even if it is somehow the press then you can just hang up." Lewis said as he shrugged his shoulders.

Cleo nodded and pressed the answer button on the phone.

"Hello?" she asked as she held the phone up to her ear.

Suddenly her face absolutely white and her eyes widened.

"Um, y-yes." she barely choked out before she handed the phone to me.

"I-it's for you." she whispered. She looked like she had seen a ghost. I really hoped it wasn't the press. But if it was then I was ready to deal with them. I had to face them sooner or later and the sooner I get it over with the better.

"Hello?" I answered cautiously. I had to be careful what I said if it really was the press.

"Bella. This is Sophie. I believe we had agreement?" Sophie said, sharp and clearly into the phone.

"Oh, Sophie. Hi. Yeah, we do have an agreement. Whatever you need me to do, I am there." I said.

No matter what she wanted me to do, I had to do it. Even if I _really _didn't want to. I had made a promise, to Sophie and to my friends. I was determined to protect them for as long as I could.

"Great. You disappeared yesterday after our little show and I was

worried I might have to break our deal if you didn't show up soon."

"I just... had to get away for a while. It was too much all at once."

"Well, it doesn't matter. It worked out fine in the end. Anyway, the people are already getting anxious and they want to meet the mermaid. I have a meeting worked out for the both of us tonight on live T.V. at eight o'clock."

"Oh, ok. Where should I go for this meeting?"

"I will have a limo pick you up at seven so that you can get to the studio early. Should I have it pick you up at Cleo's house?"

"Uh, yeah that should be fine. Wait, actually could you have the limo pick me up at the corner of 1st and C street?"

"I guess so, why?"

"I, uh, don't really want the press to know where Cleo lives. Or that I am staying at her house. It might make them suspicious."

"Okay, that should be fine. The press wouldn't know that the limo was there to pick you up though, if you wanted me to have it pick you up at Cleo's house. The press wouldn't even be watching where it goes."

"Maybe you're right, but I don't want to take any chances."

"Fine. If that is what you want. Just be sure you are at the right spot at exactly seven o'clock. I don't want you late for the interview."

"I won't be late."

"You better not be. If you are, the deal is off." she said with venom in her voice. Without bothering to say good-bye, she hung up the phone.

I figured she was probably just saying that to make sure I wasn't late. I doubted that she would give up our deal. I didn't want to risk it though, just in case.

"Well, I guess I have plans for tonight." I sighed as I set down the phone.

"What did she say?" "What do you mean you have plans?" "Is everthing okay?" "What is going on?" my friends all asked at once.

"Everything is fine, I guess. I am going to do an interview tonight at eight with one of the major news stations." I said.

"Where are they going to do the interview?" Cleo asked.

"I don't really know. Sophie is having a limo come to pick me up. I am assuming they are going to do it somewhere here in town."

"A limo? Wow. I guess Sophie is rich already." Rikki said.

"Yeah, well I figured she really would be a millionaire over night. I told her to have it pick me up on the corner of 1st and C street just in case the press was following it. I wouldn't want them to know where you live." I said.

"That is a good idea, I hadn't even thought of that. Thanks, Bella." Cleo said.

"I don't even know if they would be following it but I figured it is better to be safe than sorry." I said.

"So, what are you planning to say at the interview?" Zane asked.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Well I am sure they are going to ask how you became a mermaid. What are you planning to say? You can't say the truth, unless you want a bunch of little girls going out to search for moon pools every full moon." Zane said.

"Oh, I guess you are right. I hadn't thought of anything to say. But it would be best to have some answers ready before, I suppose." I said.

"You could say you were born a mermaid." Cleo said.

"Yeah I think that is what I will say. I can't think of anything better." I said.

"That works, I guess." Lewis said.

"It will only raise more questions though. I'm sure they will start asking questions about your parents after that." Zane said.

"Well can you think of anything better? If I come up with some story of how I became a mermaid, people would begin to try it and see if it works. It is best to just say that I was born this way and that I have no idea how or why." I said.

"Good point. I guess that you will say you were just born that way."

"I'm on the right track, baby, I was born this way!" Rikki began to sing.

"Ooh no you don't." Zane said as he cupped his hand over her mouth.

"Why not? It is a great song." Rikki pouted after he took his hand away.

"It's not the song, it is the singer. You can't carry a tune, Rikki." Zane said.

"Hey! I'm not that bad, am I?" she asked as she turned to look at the rest of us.

"Um..."

"Not that bad..."

"Maybe with some practice..."

"Fine, I'll be quiet." Rikki said, clearly not happy.

"So what are you going to wear?" Cleo asked excitedly.

"Um, I don't know. I don't really want to leave your house, I know it sounds silly but I don't want to face all of the people out there ... can I just borrow something of yours?" I asked.

"Of course! And it isn't silly at all. I totally understand that you don't want to face everyone out there yet." Cleo said.

"Thanks." I said.

"We can look through my closet later and find something for you to wear. But first, who wants pancakes?" Cleo asked.

****AN: I don't speak Spanish. At all. I just used Google translator. Sorry if it got messed up.****

****Well? What did you think? TELL ME! I WANT TO KNOW! Please, please, please review! It encourages me to write more when I see that people like my story. So the more reveiws, the sooner the updates!****

10. Chapter 10

****AN: Um... I don't really have anything to say. Just enjoy it!****

****OH! Actually I do have something to say. I haven't said this in the last several chapters, but I DON'T OWN ANYTHING. NOTHING. AT ALL. I'M JUST A FAN.****

Once we finished eating burnt pancakes drowned in syrup, Cleo and I headed upstairs to find something for me to wear.

"I would help you guys find something for Bella, but I don't think I can get up the stairs. Unless Zane wants to carry me..." Rikki said from her spot on the couch.

"No. No, no, no. I can not carry you up those stairs. It is absolutely, postitively, no." Zane said.

"Ugh, fine. I guess you guys are on your own. Unless Lewis wants-"

"No." Lewis cut her off before she had a chance to finish her sentence.

"I will show you what we have chosen before we make the final decision, just to make sure that it has Princess Rikki's approval." Cleo said sarcastically.

"You better. You need my advice." Rikki said.

"Maybe you shouldn't use Rikki's advice. We have all seen the way she dresses." Lewis said.

"What is that supposed to mean! I have a great sense of fashion." Rikki said.

"I never said you didn't." Lewis said.

"Not exactly, but you implied it!" Rikki said.

"You don't know that." Lewis said with a grin.

Suddenly Rikki was holding out her hand and Lewis' coffee was instantly boiling hot. As soon as she got it the temperature she wanted it she stopped.

Lewis unfortunately didn't seem to notice and he took a sip before we could warn him not to.

"Ahh! Ahh! Hot! Rikki! Ouch!" Lewis shouted as he set the mug down.

Rikki just smirked and watched Lewis as he suffered.

"Well, we have to go and find something for Bella to wear. You children just sort this out for yourselves." Cleo said as she continued to walk up the stairs.

"Children? We don't act childish!" Rikki protested.

"I think she was just referring to you, Rikki." Zane said.

"Hey! You two are just as bad, if not worse." Rikki said.

"La, la, la, la, la, I'm not listening." Lewis said as he plugged his ears.

"Oh, look who is acting childish now! Isn't that very childish, Zane?" Rikki said.

"I'm not taking sides." Zane said as he held up his hands.

"Come on Bella. Let's go." Cleo said as she grabbed my hand and tried not to laugh.

I let out a small giggle and then followed Cleo upstairs to her room.

I plopped down on Cleo's bed as soon as we walked into her room. She walked over to her closet and began sorting through all of her clothes.

"So, how are you doing... with all of this?" I asked cautiously. Cleo had seemed in a pretty good mood most of the morning, and I didn't want to ruin that.

She let out a huge sigh and shook her head.

"I don't know. I'm confused... and scared. I'm afraid to go outside, even though the press doesn't even know about me... I am just trying

not to think about it. When I do... I just get too scared ... and nervous... to even function." she said slowly.

I nodded. Maybe I shouldn't have brought it up.

"So, I am trying to focus on small tasks to keep my mind busy. I know it seems silly to be thinking so much about what you are going to wear at a time like this, right now I honestly couldn't care less, but it gives me something to think about." she continued.

"Well, that is good. Focusing on things..." I trailed off, not really sure what to say.

"How about you? How are you holding up?" Cleo asked.

"I don't think it has really sunken in yet. It still sort of feels like a dream." I said after I thought about it for a moment.

"Yeah, I get that. I was like that for a while too. But after seeing all the news stories... I know that it is real and now I am just trying to cope with it." she said as she turned away from me and continued to look through the closet.

"How about this one?" she asked as she held up a yellow sundress with flowers on it.

"Um... too casual. I think I should dress up a bit more."

"This one?" Cleo held up another dress.

"Too red."

"Too strappy."

"Too short."

"Too low-cut."

"Too pink."

"Too black."

"Too... I don't know. But it just isn't right."

"Too orange."

"Too hot. I don't want long sleeves."

"Too itchy."

"What? How can you tell if it is itchy or not?" Cleo asked after my last remark.

"I just can. It looks like it would be itchy."

"Well it isn't."

"It looks itchy to me."

"It's not! Here, feel it. Is that itchy?"

"Well... no. Fine, it is too green."

"Don't you like green?"

"I do, but this one is too... yucky green. Like a rotten avocado."

"Gross."

"Exactly."

"Fine. But I am running out of dresses."

"Well, just keep going."

"Okay, this one?"

"Too stripey."

"Too polka dotty."

"Too flowery."

"Too- WAIT! That is it! Let me look at it closer." I said as she held up the last dress in her closet.

"Your kidding me right? The very last dress in my closet is the one you want?"

"Well you have to admit, it is beautiful!"

"Yeah, I always have liked that one."

I grabbed the dress out of her hands and took a closer look at it. It was a light blue dress that faded into turquoise at the bottom. The bottom was all different lengths, parts of the dress looked like it would come to just above my knee while other parts of the dress looked like it would almost reach my ankle.

It had a slightly low v-neck, which I would not usually be a fan of, but the rest of the dress was so beautiful that I was not going to let that stop me from wearing it. It was sleeveless, and had no back, so it almost looked like a beach dress.

The whole dress was very shimmery and looked like water. I loved it. Sure, maybe it was a bit expected of what a mermaid wear, but who cares. It was gorgeous.

The straps were covered in sparkles and just added to the watery look. The material was super soft but very high quality feeling. I didn't know exactly what kind of material it was but it felt very expensive.

"Wow." I said after I a chance to fully look at dress.

"I know. That is why I bought it. I have never worn it though, I never had a chance to. It always felt to fancy and I never wanted to mess it up."

"Are you sure you don't mind me wearing it?"

"Not at all. Why don't you try it on, just to make sure it fits."

"Good idea. Oh, now I'm nervous it won't fit." I said as I stood up and walked into Cleo's bathroom that was connected to her room.

I quickly shed the clothes I was wearing and slipped into the beautiful dress. It fit perfectly! I looked in the mirror and smoothed down my hair a bit and then I walked back out into Cleo's room.

"Well, what do you think?" I said as I twirled around in the dress.

Cleo gasped. "Wow. Just... wow. Bella that dress fits like it was made for you. It fits you better than it fits me."

"Really?" I said as I smiled and did another twirl.

"Yeah. I mean, wow. That color of the dress really brings out your eyes. And it looks great against your tan skin. It really is like it was made for you."

I looked into the full length mirror Cleo had in her room. Wow. I looked... wow. The dress flowed like water and it really did fit me perfectly. It was so shimmery and beautiful.

"So, are we going to show Rikki?" Cleo asked.

"Um... let's wait until tonight. When I have my hair all done and some make-up on. We can surprise her. You know she would totally agree with this dress anyway, right?"

"Yeah, she would definitely agree. Okay, we'll surprise her."

"So, let's choose some shoes." I said excitedly as I clasped my hands together and smiled.

Cleo groaned and said "Do we have to go through the same procedure we did with the dresses? Because that took forever."

"I didn't think it was that bad."

Cleo rolled her eyes and shook her head. "Okay, but let's narrow it down first. What color of shoes?"

We decided on some sparkly, silver, sandals with thin straps. They went with the dress perfectly and fit me great.

"I can't wait to see what you will look like tonight! You know, with the whole outfit on." Cleo said.

"How do you think I should wear my hair?"

"Hmm... down. I think it looks prettiest down. We can get it wet and let it dry all wavy. We don't need to do much styling, we can just have it look all natural and wavy."

"Good idea. Sort of beachy, to match the dress."

Cleo nodded.

I had been letting my hair grow out for quite some time now and it almost reached my waist. Longer hair certainly got in the way while swimming but I really liked the look of it.

Plus, once I dried off my hair was back in the condition it was before I got in the water, so it didn't matter if it got tangled while swimming.

After I changed out of the dress we laid it out on Cleo's bed. I set the shoes I was going to wear tonight with it and then we walked back downstairs.

"You only get two five-hundred dollar bills!" Lewis whined.

"No! I am positive that you get five. If you only get two, then you are practically poor!" Rikki shouted.

"I still think you get three. Five is too many, two isn't enough." Zane said.

Rikki, Zane, and Lewis had pushed the coffee table out of the way and were all sprawled out on the floor of the living room around a Monopoly game. They clearly had been fighting about this for a while.

"Uh, I see you guys found our Monopoly game." Cleo said.

"Let's ask Cleo. Cleo, how many five-hundred dollar bills do you get?" Rikki asked, sounding awfully confident she was right.

"Um, I don't really know. Why don't you just look in the directions?" Cleo asked.

"Rikki burnt the directions." Zane said.

"What? How?" Cleo asked.

"Lewis wouldn't hand them over!" Rikki said.

"Well you didn't have to burn them! And you almost caught my hair on fire." Lewis said.

I looked near the box and sure enough there was a pile of ash that had once been the directions. I just rolled my eyes and shook my head.

"Look, how about I get five bills, Lewis gets two, and Zane gets three." Rikki said.

"What! Rikki, that isn't fair. We all have to start out with the same amount." Lewis protested.

"It seems fair to me." Rikki said.

"You know what, now that I think about, I think you are supposed to get five bills." Zane said with a smile.

"Exactly. Good choice Zane." Rikki said.

"Zane, you can't do that!" Lewis said.

"Why not?" Zane asked.

"Yeah Lewis, why not?" Rikki asked smugly.

"You just can't! That isn't how- oh whatever. Fine. Give me three more bills." Lewis said, sounding defeated.

"I want to be the dog!" Rikki called out as she reached for the small silver dog.

"Hey! I am always the dog." Lewis whined.

"Well, I called it first. Choose something else." Rikki said.

"I call the car." Zane said as he picked it up.

"You guys took all the good ones!" Lewis said.

"You should have said what you wanted sooner." Rikki shrugged.

"I'll be the hat." Lewis said glumly.

"So did you guys find something for Bella to wear?" Rikki asked as she counted her money.

"Well... yeah." Cleo said.

"Great! Where is it?" Rikki asked.

"Upstairs..." Cleo trailed off.

"Can I see it?" Rikki asked.

"Um... no. We want it to be a surprise." I said.

"I thought you guys said I could help pick!" Rikki said.

"I know, but I want you to see it for the first time when I have the whole outfit on with my hair done and stuff." I said.

"Hey! You guys started without me!" Rikki shouted at the boys who had begun playing Monopoly.

"You were talking." Lewis shrugged.

"Yeah, for like thirty seconds." Rikki said.

"We barely started, just join in." Zane said.

"No! We have to start all over now. I always roll the dice first." Rikki said.

"Rikki, who cares just-" Lewis managed to say before Rikki cut him off.

"No. We are starting over. Unless you want all of your money burnt." Rikki said as she held out her hand.

"Rikki! That is the only Monopoly game we have, and I would prefer that you don't ruin it anymore!" Cleo said.

"Ugh, fine. But we are starting over!" Rikki said as she lowered her hand down.

"I'm not sure if I want to get in the middle of the Monopoly war, but it does sound like fun. Can I play too?" I asked.

"Sure, if we are going to start over anyway." Zane said.

"Well I guess I will play too." Cleo sighed.

We both layed down on our stomachs around the game and picked out which pieces we wanted to be.

"I'll be the iron, I guess." I said.

"I'll be the shoe." Cleo said.

"Uh, guys? We ran out of five-hundreds." Rikki said as she was dealing out the money.

"I told you we are only supposed to get two." Lewis said.

"You are supposed to get five!" Rikki said.

"Maybe we shouldn't have joined in." I said to Cleo.

Cleo just chuckled and continued counting her money.

"Well if you are supposed to get five, then how do you explain this!" Lewis said.

"Cleo's game must be missing some of the money." Rikki said.

"No, actually it isn't. It has the right amount." Cleo said.

"Well, then we just have too many people playing. You are supposed to get five, but I will make exception and for this game, we will get two." Rikki said.

Zane and Lewis laughed and shook their heads at Rikki.

"What?" Rikki asked.

"Nothing." Zane said with a grin on his face.

"What are you laughing at? Lewis?" Rikki asked.

"Let's just play the game." Lewis said with a smile on his face.

Once we were done playing Monopoly, we decided that we all should call our famillies just so that they wouldn't be worried and come looking for us.

Rikki went first, then Zane, then Lewis, and then me. Cleo was also going to call her parents just to make sure they were still going to be gone for while.

I was absolutely dreading my call. My parents had certainly seen what was all over the news, and knowing my parents they would most likely be in denial. Which would only make it worse.

"Hi, Dad. It's Rikki." Rikki said nervously into the phone.

We could hear her dad yelling from the other end of the line. Rikki winced and held the phone away from her ear.

"I take it he is angry?" Zane whispered.

Rikki nodded her head.

"No, I wasn't at Zane's house." Rikki sighed into the phone.

Zane chuckled and shook his head "He still has absolutely zero trust in me."

Rikki nodded again and rolled her eyes.

"I am at Cleo's house. I spent the night here last night. I'm sorry I didn't call... I just... forgot?" Rikki said cautiously.

That was followed by yelling.

"I know Dad, I know. I'm sorry, I really meant to call." Rikki said.

There was no more yelling after that so I assumed he had calmed down.

"Um... I don't think I will be coming home." Rikki said.

And more shouting. I guess he wasn't done.

"Well... I just can't really come home. I'm sorry. I would if I could, but I can't." Rikki said.

"Uh... got to go, bye!" Rikki said quickly before hanging up the phone.

"Okay, I'm done." Rikki said.

"I'm assuming he didn't take it very well that you weren't coming home?" Cleo asked.

"Not well at all. He is furious. I just hope he doesn't try to come get me." Rikki sighed.

"I guess it is my turn." Zane said as he reached for the phone.

"Hey, Dad, it's me." Zane said.

"Oh. Uh, sure." Zane sighed.

"What did he say?" Rikki asked.

"He put me on hold." Zane chuckled and shook his head.

After waiting for several minutes, Zane's dad came back to the phone.

"Hey. So I was just calling to say sorry about last night." Zane said.

"Um, well I was gone. I didn't come home."

"You didn't even notice I was gone?"

"Oh, well bye." Zane shook his head again and hung up.

"What happened?" Rikki asked.

"He didn't even notice I was gone. And he didn't even care enough to ask where I was. He said he had to go, a client or someone important was calling on the other line." Zane said.

"Oh, Zane, that is awful. I'm sorry." I said.

"Eh, don't be. I'm used to it. He does this all the time, it isn't anything new." Zane shrugged.

Lewis' call went okay. His parents didn't seem angry that he was gone but they cared enough to at least ask where he was.

And then it was my turn. I was extremely nervous.

"Cleo, are you sure you don't want to go before me?" I asked, wanting to stall my call for as long as possible.

"I guess I could call now, why?" Cleo asked.

"Um..." I said.

"Is it because you don't want to call your parents?" Cleo asked, practically reading my mind.

"Well..." I said.

"Bella, you have to call them sooner or later. And the sooner the better." Cleo said.

"Your right. I know your right. I just... really don't want to." I mumbled the last part.

"It will be fine. Just call them. They are your parents, after all. You shouldn't have any reason to be worried." Cleo said.

"Fine. I'll do it. Hand me the phone so I can get it over with before I change my mind." I sighed.

Cleo handed me the phone and I quickly dialed in my parents number.

I was sitting cross-legged on the couch with Cleo and Lewis on either

side of me. Rikki was sprawled out on the floor right in front of us and Zane was leaning against the kitchen counter with his arms crossed.

My parents were both a bit old when I was born, so by now they were around sixty years old. Me and my mom never really got along well. Our personalities just didn't click.

The only reason my dad and I got along was because we hardly even talked to each other. He kept to himself and didn't make any effort to socialize with me.

My parents were very old fashioned, and would hardly ever accept anything new. Which is why I knew that this wouldn't go over well.

"Hello?" my mom answered.

"Um... hi mom. It's me." I said, suddenly thinking this was a bad idea.

"Bella? Where are you? We have been worried sick." my mom said. She has always talked very slow and... grandmotherly. Although she wasn't always sweet and kind, she could be very cold and just plain mean sometimes.

"I'm at Cleo's house." I said.

"Oh, well all right dear. That is fine. We were just a bit worried when you didn't call. Although I guess you are old enough now that we shouldn't be worried about you." she said.

"Um... yeah okay. I mean, I'm only eighteen. Still a teenager." I said.

"Oh, right. So did you have fun at Cleo's house? She seems like a very nice girl to me." My mom said.

"Uh, yeah I guess. Mom? Have you... uh... seen the news lately?" I asked, wondering why she hadn't even mentioned the fact that her daughter was a mermaid.

"Oh! I nearly forgot about that." my mom said suddenly.

"What?" I said, confused as to how she forget something like this.

"Yes, isn't that the strangest thing. That girl on the news... that is what you are referring to, right dear?" my mom asked.

"Uh..."

"Well anyway, isn't that odd? She looks just like you. And she even has your same name! What a coincidence! I do believe it is all fake though. I mean really? A mermaid?" my mom chuckled.

"Mom, that is-"

"You know, the same thing happened to you uncle back in... oh when

was it?... 1976! That's right. It was the 1976 Summer Olympics. There was this man in the Olympics named John Hartley! And he looked just like Uncle John, too. He was quite a bit taller, and twenty years younger, and he had brown hair... but besides that he looked just like him. And you know I think-"

"MOM!" I shouted in order to get my mother's attention.

"Yes dear?"

"That is me, on the news. I'm a mermaid." I sighed.

"You're very funnny, dear, but I know that isn't you. You are my daughter, not a fish." my mom laughed.

"Mom, that really is me." I said calmy.

"Ridiculous. I think I would have known if my own baby girl was a fish." my mom spat out almost angrily.

"Stop saying that! I'm not a fish! I'm a... mermaid. Can't I be your daughter... and a mermaid?" I asked with tears in my eyes.

"Bella, who is putting you up to this? Why are you lying to own mother?" my mom asked me, as if I was a child who was doing something wrong.

"No one! No one is... putting me up to this. And I'm not lying! If you would just stop for a minute and realize that I am telling the truth-"

"No. I don't believe it. You are lying to me Bella. Now, I want this joke of yours to stop this very instant. Tell me you aren't some... fish."

"I can't Mom! This is who I am!"

"Is it true Bella?" my mom choked out, and I assumed she was crying.

"Yes... it's true. I've been a mermaid since I was nine."

"Nine! And you didn't even think of telling of me?" she sounded appalled.

"I did Mom! Do you have any idea how many hours I spent thinking about telling you?"

I was sobbing and shaking at this point. Cleo had her arms wrapped around me to calm me down and Lewis had his hand resting comfortably on my arm.

"And why didn't you? Did you think you couldn't trust me?"

"I... I didn't know who I could trust. I was... scared. At first. And then I learned to live with it and I just-"

"I can't think about this right now." my mom sighed.

"Well then when will you think about it! You never have time for me!

This whole thing is your fault, really!"

"What do you mean by that?"

"If you wouldn't have left me alone when we were in Ireland, I wouldn't have wandered off and found the sea caves in the first place!"

"This isn't natural Bella. It isn't right."

"I-"

"Your not even human!"

"I didn't choose this." I sobbed into the phone.

"You have disappointed and disgusted me, Bella. Just to even think that I was living in the same house as a... a fish!"

"Mom! Stop it!" I cried into the phone.

"Goodbye Bella."

"Mom? Mommy?"

"Don't you dare think about coming back into this house."

"Are... are you disowning me?"

"I don't know Bella. I need time to think." and with that she hung up the phone.

I dropped the phone into my lap, stunned. What just happened?

"Bella? Bella are you okay?" I could hear Lewis asking me, but it was like I wasn't even there. I just kept staring straight ahead of me, non-responsive.

"I think she is in shock." Cleo said quietly.

"It did seem pretty bad, from what I could hear." Zane said.

"Poor Bella." Rikki mumbled.

"What should we do?" Lewis asked.

"I don't know." Zane said.

"Um, Bella? Do you want to go lay down?" Cleo asked me. I slowly nodded. She helped me up from the couch and then up the stairs to her room.

This seemed awfully similar to what we did last night.

****AN: Well? What did you think? Tell me! I want to know!****

****Oh, and I remember that before I made an account on here I thought you couldn't leave reviews unless you had an account. So, just to clear things up, YOU CAN. I don't know if it was just me who thought**

that, but if you are not a member on here you can still review. So now you have no excuse not to! REVIEW, REVIEW, REVIEW!**

**Here is the link to Bella's dress that she chose to wear to the interview: ** .

11. Chapter 11

AN: Wow. Long time, no update. Sorry, I really don't have any excuse besides writer's block and plain old laziness. I have chapter 12 more than half way done, though. I will probably upload it tonight or tomorrow. Hopefully...

Apparently the link to Bella's dress didn't work. Here it is again, just type out the spaces: home /resource/ Almaj/ Beach02.jpg

SUMMARY: Will got a picture of Bella in mermaid-form. Sophie found said picture and has figured out that the girls are mermaids. Hoping to keep Sophie from exposing her friends, Bella offered to go along with whatever Sophie wants her to do (interviews and what-not). Sophie staged it so that Bella would be splashed on a beach, allowing the surrounding people to take photos and videos. Stories about Bella are all over the news, and Sophie has set up an interview with a news station. Bella is to meet her in a parking lot at seven o'clock. In the meantime, Bella called her mother to talk about her mermaidyness. Bella's mother didn't take it so well, and has somewhat disowned Bella, leaving Bella in a state of shock.

"Bella is lay down upstairs. She will probably go right to sleep." Cleo said as she walked back down the stairs.

"Do you think she will be okay for tonight?" Lewis asked.

"I hope so." Cleo sighed.

"I don't really think right now is the best time for an interview. It will only traumatize her more, and she might let something slip out about you guys or the moonpool or something." Zane said.

"Your right, but what is the other option?" Cleo asked.

"Just blow the whole thing off. Who cares?" Rikki said.

"If we do that, Sophie is sure to tell everyone about us." I said.

"I don't even care at this point. If it would help Bella to not go to that interview tonight, then I say we should just let Sophie expose us." Rikki said.

"What? Rikki, we can't do that." Cleo said.

"Why not? I mean, she is basically black mailing Bella. The sooner we get the secret out, the sooner we can get rid of Sophie." Rikki said.

"Well..." Cleo trailed off.

"The secret will undoubtedly get out sooner or later. Plus, it is just so hard to constantly be worrying about being splashed or having something spilled on us. This secret has caused us so much stress and has limited what we can do. I mean, wouldn't it just be easier if everyone knew?" Rikki said.

"I don't know Rikki. Think about it, if everyone knew it would cause a whole new kind of stress. I highly doubt that people would just accept it and leave us alone." Cleo said.

Rikki just shrugged, letting the conversation drop for the moment.

Upstairs, Bella was fast asleep. The pressure of her secret being out was really starting to hit her and she was pretty much knocked out the second her head hit the pillow.

She slept most of the day away, subconsciously trying to escape the stress of the real world.

By the time she did actually wake up it was around five o'clock. She awoke feeling rested and much better than she had before, and had somewhat succeeded in temporarily putting her feelings about her mother behind her. She was hoping that she would be able to make it through the evening, which would undoubtedly be the most stressful task she was yet to face.

Bella got out of bed and walked straight into the bathroom, about to attempt to at least make herself somewhat presentable. Figuring that since she was going to be on television and there would be people there to do her hair and makeup, she just worried about brushing her hair.

It took her forever to actually get her hair tangle-free. It felt like she had been sleeping for days on end, which she kind of had. Consequentially, she had massive bed head. She couldn't help but wince as the cheap plastic brush snagged on every knot in her hair.

Once she was finished brushing her hair, Bella slipped into the dress she and Cleo had decided on earlier. She did a quick twirl in the mirror and couldn't help but smile. She had loved the way that dresses made her feel like a princess ever since she was a little girl.

Bella reached up and firmly held the moon stone that hung around her neck, as if waiting for it to give her some sort of strength. In a way, it did. The necklace symbolized who she was and what she had been through. It helped that Cleo and Rikki always wore theirs. It made her feel connected to them even more.

She put on the silver sandals they had decided on earlier to complete the look, and then she headed downstairs.

"So, did I miss much while I was knocked out?" Bella asked as she walked down the stairs and into Cleo's living room.

"Bella! I didn't realize you were up." Cleo said as she jumped up from the couch. She and Rikki seemed to have been watching something on TV, but had shut it off as soon as I came down stairs. It was most

likely more news stories about me and my mermaidness.

"Yeah, I got up a few minutes ago. Thought I would go ahead and get ready. Sorry I kinda snoozed the day away."

"Oh, don't worry about that! If sleep helped you feel better, than it is definitely good. It did make you feel better, didn't it?" Cleo asked.

"Much better." Bella nodded.

"Love the dress, Bella. I would love it more if you guys had let me help pick, but you know, whatever." Rikki said, rolling over so that she was on her stomach on the floor.

"Thanks, and...um... sorry." Bella said trying to avoid Rikki's infamous death glare that she was currently sporting.

Rikki just rolled her eyes but had a slight grin on her face that showed she wasn't really mad about it.

"Where are Zane and Lewis?" Bella asked, not seeing them in the living room.

"Oh, they went outside. Zane wanted to look at Lewis' brother's truck more." Cleo said.

Bella nodded and then went over to sit on the couch.

A few minutes later the guys came in, rather loudly.

"I think we should order a pizza. Are you guys hungry?" Rikki asked as she reached for the phone that was sitting on the floor.

"Mmm... pizza sounds good." Cleo said.

"I do feel kind of hungry." Bella agreed.

"Okay, I'll call it in. What kind of toppings do you guys want?" Rikki said as she started to dial the number for the pizza place.

"Lots of meat." Zane said as he plopped down on the couch.

"Agreed." Lewis nodded.

"What is it with guys and meat?" Cleo asked.

Rikki shrugged and started to place the order "Hi, um, can we have a large pizza with pepperoni..."

"And sausage." Zane interrupted.

Rikki rolled her eyes and said "...and sausage, pineapple, olives..."

"Get some veggies on there too." Bella added.

Rikki nodded and then continued on with the order "...bellpeppers, mushrooms, and...um... whatever other vegetables you have."

Rikki gave the person on the other end of the call the address and then hung up the phone.

"You guys didn't want any drinks, right?" Rikki asked.

"No, we're good. We have plenty of drinks in the fridge." Cleo said.

About twenty minutes later the doorbell rang. Bella quickly jumped up without thinking to answer the door.

"Bella!"

"Wait!"

"No!" multiple voices came calling out from the living room, but it was too late. Bella had already opened the door.

"Hey! You're that Bella chick!" The young pizza guy said.

"I... uh... no?" Bella stuttered out.

"This is so cool! Can I have your autograph? Can you show me your tail?" the guy said quickly and excitedly.

"I'm n-not her. I-I'm not... not Bella. My name is... Anne."

"Yeah right. You're totally her!"

Before Bella could react the guy had somehow found a bottle of water and was working quickly to unscrew the cap.

Bella looked over in panic at the rest of the group who seemed to just be sitting there, and wondered why they weren't helping her.

Cleo caught her eye and gave her a very pointed look, then looked at the water bottle. Bella looked closer and realized her hand was flexed. She winked at her and then Bella realized that they weren't doing nothing, they were trying to look inconspicuous.

So they had a plan. Or at least they appeared to.

Bella braced herself as the guy tossed the water at her.

'Cleo will stop it, Cleo will stop it, Cleo will stop-' she thought over and over in her head, when suddenly she felt the water hit her skin.

Within a second, the liquid on her arm was lifted by Cleo and evaporated by Rikki.

She let out an internal sigh of relief as soon as the water was off of her.

"Oh." the guy said with a frown, "I thought you were supposed to... you know..." he trailed off.

"Uh, yeah. Like I said, not me. I'm normal. Very normal. So normal

that you shouldn't even suspect anything at all because of my extreme amount of normality that is very, very, very, nor-

"What she is trying to say is thanks for the pizza." Zane said as walked up behind Bella and grabbed the pizza. He quickly shoved a wad of money into the guys hands and slammed the door in his face.

"Ooops. I babbled."

"A lot." Zane said.

"Sorry?" Bella said, but phrased it more like a question.

"It doesn't matter. He didn't seem like the brightest bulb, so hopefully he won't think to say anything." Zane said as he carried the pizza into the kitchen and set it on the counter.

"What could he say? It is pretty much common knowledge that Bella is a mermaid." Lewis said as he grabbed a coke out of the fridge.

"Lewis has a point." Cleo said.

"Uh, he could say where Bella is living. And then we will have a boatload of reporters crowded around the house, day and night." Rikki said.

"Oh." Bella said.

"That would be bad." Lewis said.

"Very bad." agreed Zane.

"Just what we need. Another problem added to this already huge mess." Cleo said with a sigh.

"I can't think about this right now. I am already super stressed about the interview, can we just talk about this later?" Bella asked.

"For now. But we can't ignore it. Sooner or later the press is going to figure out you are here." Zane said.

She just nodded glumly and grabbed a slice of pizza.

Once they were done with the pizza, the group watched TV for a while, careful to avoid any news stations that might bring down the momentarily good mood of the group.

Soon it was time for Bella to go to the interview, and she was starting to get incredibly nervous.

"What do I say? What if I mess up? Do you think I'll mess up? I can't mess up. That would be bad. They're going to be asking me questions. Lots of questions. What if I don't know the answer! What if they ask about you guys! What do I say? I can't do this... I can't-"

"Bella! Calm down. It will be fine. Just take a deep breath." Zane said as grabbed Bella's forearms to keep her from pacing.

Bella nodded and inhaled slowly through her mouth.

"You're going to do fine. You have nothing to worry about." Zane added reassuringly.

"Okay. Sorry for the momentary panic." Bella sighed as she ran her fingers through her hair.

"Bella, you don't have to do this-" Rikki started to say.

"No! I have to do this. I have to." Bella said with a resolved look on her face.

"We just don't want you to feel like you are trapped because of us." Cleo said.

Bella just looked down, biting her lip.

"I guess I should... uh... get going." Bella said after a moment later, turning to walk out the door.

"Wait!" Rikki said before Bella could leave, "Zane will drive to where you're getting picked up."

Zane turned to look at Rikki, a questioning look on his face.

"Right, Zane?" Rikki said through her teeth.

"Uh... yeah... right. Okay." Zane said.

"Oh, no. Really, it's fine. I'll just walk." Bella shook her head.

"It's a pretty long walk, and I don't think you want to be bombarded with people on your way there. I don't mind driving you." Zane insisted.

Bella nodded, realizing that walking probably wasn't the smartest option.

Zane walked over to Lewis and held his hand out.

"What?" Lewis asked, staring at his outstretched hand.

"I don't know if you noticed, but I don't have a car. So," Zane wiggled fingers, "keys would be nice."

Lewis sighed and pulled the keys to his brother's truck out of his pocket.

"Fine. But if you so much as get a scratch on it-"

"Yep. Got it." Zane said as he grabbed the keys right out of Lewis' hand.

"Come on, Bella." Zane said over his shoulder as he walked out the door, clearly excited about driving the truck.

Bella shot one last nervous glance at her friends before walking out the door.

"Um... thanks for driving me." Bella said after several minutes of uncomfortable silence.

She was sitting in the passenger seat of the truck and honestly could not see what all the fuss was about. Zane seemed super excited to be driving it, but it looked like a pile of junk to her.

"Uh-huh." Zane said, seeming somewhat distracted.

"Look at this radio. You can't find these anywhere! The cool thing is that it is the original one installed in here." Zane said while playing with the dials on it.

Bella looked at it closer, trying to see why it was so special.

"It just looks old to me." Bella shrugged.

"It's vintage, and extremely hard to find working models." Zane looked offended that she didn't find it as cool as he did.

"Why is this wire sticking out." Bella lifted the wire that jutted straight from the side of the radio.

"Don't touch it! It needs to stay in that spot so that..."

He went on with lengthy explanation about it, but Bella tuned out once his words started to sound more and more like a foreign language.

"... the blue wire, and if you move it the static will come in stronger, cancelling out the incoming signals. Cool, right?" Zane finished.

"Uh... yeah. Nifty." Bella nodded to emphasize her point.

Zane nodded and they lapsed back into awkward silence. There really wasn't anything to talk about, besides the fact that they were headed towards what was going to most likely be the worst experience of Bella's life, a topic they were both happy to ignore.

"Woah. Looks like someone didn't keep their mouth shut about the pick-up spot." Zane said as he rounded the corner. Right where Bella was supposed to be picked up, there was tons of news vans and reporters crowded around a single black limosine.

Bella groaned and let her head fall back onto the disintegrating head rest.

Zane maneuvered the truck into a narrow alley and then turned off the engine.

"Don't want to be seen." he explained.

"Never thought I would be going into a dark and creepy alley to feel safe." Bella mumbled under her breath.

Zane smiled slightly but it quickly diminished as the situation fully

hit him.

"What do you want to do?" Zane asked.

"What do you mean? I have to face them, what is the other option?" Bella said in a defeated voice.

"No, you don't. I can drive you back and-"

"Zane, my mind is made up. I am going to this interview, I just need to figure out the most effective way to get through the reporters." she said in a much stronger voice.

"Okay. So, any ideas?" Zane asked as he surveyed what he could see of the crowd, trying to form a plan for getting Bella through.

"Not yet." Bella sighed, looking out the window.

"I could plow through the reporters straight to the limo, and you could jump out right as I pull up." Zane said, only half joking.

"As tempting as it is to ram into the reporters, I doubt that would lead to much good press. Besides, I'm not a big fan of gore." Bella sighed.

"Zane, drive." she said, her eyes widening as she spotted camera flashes further down the dark alley.

"What?" he said as he turned around in his seat to see what she was staring at.

"Now! There are reporters down there." she said, her voice rising as the camera flashes got closer.

Bella watched as Zane started to feel around in the cup holders and underneath the seats, panicked.

"What are you doing? We have to go!" Bella said.

"The keys. I can't find the keys!"

Bella's eyes widened as she realized they might be trapped. She started to help him feel around for them, but it was so dark that she couldn't even see her own hands.

Bella sucked in a deep breath, her mind made up. She reached for the door handle and was half way out of the truck when Zane's shout interrupted her.

"What are you doing?" he shouted, "Get back in the car!"

"I'm going to run, straight for the limo. It will definitely distract them from you."

"Bella-" Zane said, not exactly sure how, or why, to stop her.

"They absolutely can not see you. If they do... the cafe, your house, and everywhere else you go will be surrounded. If you have to, leave the truck. You can outrun them." Bella said as she slammed the door and disappeared into the dark with a swirl of blues, greens, and

blonde.

Zane cursed under his breath. He glanced back and could actually make out the forms of reporters practically running towards him.

He knew that if he just sat there they would soon catch up. He opened his door and was prepared to sprint when suddenly he heard the clank of the keys hitting the asphalt.

Before he had a chance to be grateful for his good luck, he swiped up the keys and got back into the car. Within seconds he was driving away as fast as he could in the practically antique vehicle.

Once he was back on the road he gave a sigh of relief that he got out of there in time. He buckled his seatbelt because he didn't have time back in the alley. He squinted and looked out the window, struggling to see in the dark and with the rain. He reached down to turn on the windshield wipers, hoping that would help.

Wait.

Rain.

It's raining.

Wet.

Bella.

Mermaid.

Reporters.

Oops?

12. Chapter 12

****AN:** Two chapters in two days? It must be magic... Seriously though, I am just in a writing mood. Maybe I can keep it up... chapter 13 tomorrow? Eh... that might be pushing it.**

Zane's eyes widened as he realized that Bella could be a literal fish out of water, trapped by the mob of nosy reporters. He was getting ready to turn around to see if she was okay, when he saw multiple news vans coming up behind him and quickly gaining speed.

He cursed and thumped his head against the steering wheel, which only caused the horn to honk loudly and his headache to increase.

Shifting back into the right gear, he slammed his foot onto the pedal. He knew their vehicles were probably way faster than this truck. The only two things he had going for him was his driving ability and his knowledge of the town's streets.

Reporters for a news story this big are probably from another town and aren't likely to know how to navigate the roads, especially in weather like this. The rain was continuing to come down harder, and he could tell the wind was blowing stronger by the sound of the palm

trees frantically whipping around.

He saw a small street coming up that turned off from the main road. He wasn't sure that he could get back to Cleo's if he went that way, but if he kept going straight they would undoubtedly catch up to him.

Taking a chance, he swerved off onto the smaller street at the last minute. The truck slid on the dangerously slippery road, but he didn't hesitate. He looked up in the rearview mirror and saw that he had lost at least two of the vans on the turn.

They were headed away from the shore front now and he hoped that the storm wasn't as bad further inland.

Zane took every turn that he could, losing at one van every time. He made sure that the turns were always sharp and last-minute. There had been at least eight vehicles right at first, but now he was down to about three. It was hard to tell in the dark, though. For all he knew all eight vans could still be hot on his tail.

They were near down-town by now. The traffic around them was steadily increasing. Zane's plan was to blend in with the rest of the cars and hopefully turn off the main street and back onto a smaller road once he was sure he wasn't being followed.

Surrounded by other car lights and street lamps, Zane could clearly make out three vehicles that were definitely news vans still following him. He passed by other cars and swerved around large semi trucks, positive that in the process he had broken several driving laws.

The incoming storm lowered visibility and increased panic in unexperienced drivers. Everyone seemed to be slowing down and driving with extra caution even though the minor storm imposed no real threat.

"I think I lost 'em." Zane said, out of breath as he came in through the front door of Cleo's house.

"Lost who?" Lewis asked.

"The reporters." Zane said angrily.

"What? Bella said that there wouldn't be any." Cleo shook her head, perplexed.

"Yeah, well it looks like Sophie didn't keep her mouth shut." Zane spat out.

"Not too surprised. That's what happens when you make a deal with the devil." Rikki muttered.

"There was several vans following me, but I think I got rid of them. Hopefully none of them saw me come here. I parked the truck over on the side so you can't see it from out front." Zane told the group.

"Was Bella okay?" Cleo asked.

"I hope so. She ran out of the car before I could stop her, and then I drove away so quickly to escape the press that I didn't see if she made it to the limo. By the time I noticed it was raining, I was several blocks away." Zane recounted.

"You don't think... I mean, what if she... you know... before she could get to the car." Cleo worried.

"We need to come up with a word for it. 'Turned into a mermaid' is kind of a mouthful." Rikki mused.

"Morphed? Changed? Evolved?" Lewis offered.

"Nah, those make it sound like we are turning into werewolves or something." Rikki shook her head.

"There is only one way to know. Turn on the news." Zane said to Cleo, ignoring Rikki and Lewis.

Cleo reached for the remote and clicked the television on. Sure enough, the first news station they turned to was airing footage of Bella making a mad dash for the limo.

Reporters were swarming around her like flies, shoving microphones in her face and barking questions at her.

"Get away from me!" Bella shouted angrily at the crowd, but they continued to close in around her.

The group winced in sympathy as they watched thier friend be bombarded by the press.

Somehow, Bella got through the mass of people. She had a determined look on her face as she shoved her way past them and quickly continued straight for the open door of the limo. You could tell that she was soaking wet, and her friends knew that she was running out of time. Any second know she would 'evolve' (in the words of Lewis).

Her hair whipped wildly around her face, the storm clearly coming on stronger. The camera was shaky and the lens was continuously getting splattered with rain drops, but it remained on Bella.

Bella tumbled into the backseat of her transportation just as her legs morphed into her long golden fin. You could see the look of panic fly across her face, but it quickly turned into a cold and stony glare aimed at the nosy paparazzi. She flopped her tail into the vehicle and then slammed the door behind her.

The last piece of footage they had was of the limo pulling out of the parking lot.

Bella surveyed her surroundings as soon as she was safely in the vehicle. The backseat was spacious for a limo, but still cramped with her tail. She shifted uncomfortably and struggled to sit up.

Her eyes landed on Sophie, who was sitting directly across from her with a smug look on her face.

"Why Bella, are you all right?" she asked, her voice dripping with

sarcastic sweetness.

Bella focused her glare on Sophie. The red head seemed unfazed by it and just smirked at Bella.

"Deal's off, Sophie. You said you wouldn't tell the press where we were meeting, and you did." Bella said with much more conviction than she felt.

"Now, now. I really don't think you are in any position to be making deals, do you?"

Bella gritted her teeth, using every ounce of her strength trying not to slap the smirk off Sophie's face.

Bella suddenly noticed Will, who was sitting as far away from her as possible. He almost disappeared right into the corner of the limo. He was staring down rather glumly, and surprisingly had a somewhat guilty look on his face.

"What is he doing here?" Bella spat out.

"I thought I told you. This is your boyfriend." Sophie stated.

Bella had actually forgotten about that little piece of information. Her situation seemed to be getting worse by the minute. Why she had ever agreed to this?

Of course, she knew why she had said she would do this. 'It is for my friends.' she tried to remind herself, but it lacked the conviction that had inspired her to comply with Sophie in the first place.

There wasn't much she could do about it now, anyway. If she decided she was done being Sophie's puppet, she still had to go to this interview. She couldn't ask Sophie to drive her back to Cleo's house, and she couldn't exactly jump out of the vehicle and make a run for it in the rain.

"At least she didn't get trapped in the middle of the crowd." Cleo sighed and clicked off the television.

"What time is the interview airing?" Rikki asked.

"I'm pretty sure they're doing it live, and Bella said it started at eight." Zane said.

The overall feeling of the group was glum. Everyone was nervous about the interview. They weren't really sure what kinds of questions the interviewer would be asking Bella. It didn't help that the only person there to support their friend was Sophie, the very person that everyone in the group trusted the least.

Frantic pounding on the door got everyones attention. All four heads whipped towards the entryway.

Identical thoughts raced through their minds.

"Do you think it is the reporters?" Lewis asked Zane.

"I thought you said they didn't follow you!" Cleo's voice became high with panic.

"They didn't! I was sure I lost them." Zane shook his head. He hurried over to the window and pulled back the curtain, trying to see the doorway.

"I can't see who it is." Zane shook his head and walked away from the window.

Cleo sighed and made her way towards the door, trying to come with what to do if it was a crowd of reporters waiting on her porch.

"Zane, toss me that blanket." Rikki said.

Zane grabbed the blanket off the floor and helped Rikki to make it look like she wasn't hiding a tail underneath it.

Cleo glanced back to make sure that Rikki was covered, and then she opened the door.

"Emma!" Cleo exclaimed, surprised to see her friend standing in front of her.

"What took you so long?" Emma sighed impatiently and hurried inside. She closed her extra large umbrella, careful not to get any drops on her.

"Um, sorry. We kind of thought it was the press." Cleo confessed as she closed the door.

"Oh." Emma just nodded.

"Why are you here? Not that I'm not happy to see you! It just seems like an odd time to be taking a stroll." Cleo pointed out with a slight grin.

"Actually, my parents and Elliot are outside in the car. I came here to say goodbye." Emma explained with a frown.

"Goodbye? Where are you going?" Rikki asked, confused.

"I told my family about me. That I am a mermaid. I didn't say anything about you guys, but obviously they have heard about Bella." Emma said.

"Why? I mean, why now?" asked Lewis.

"It just felt like the right time. I've been keeping secrets from them for too long, and with everything about Bella... I don't know, it just seemed right." Emma stated.

Cleo nodded, understanding how the secret can drive a wedge between the ones you love because it had often happened to her. It was hard to constantly come with excuses to get out of family beach trips or other similar activities.

"They took it all really well, surprisingly. But my mom... she doesn't want us to be here. Right now, anyway. She doesn't think it

is safe because of how much attention Bella is getting." Emma sighed.

"So, you're just going to leave?" said Rikki, a hint of accusation in her voice.

"My dad got a great job offer in Barcelona. We have some friends we can stay with in Spain until we get our own place. We aren't leaving just because of the mermaid thing, but that is what made the final decision." confessed Emma.

"And you guys are leaving now?" Cleo sniffled.

"We have to. The cheapest flight for the next month in leaving in a few hours. It was all kind of last minute." Emma said.

"But it seems like you just got back." Cleo sputtered, her eyes slowly filling with unshed tears at the thought that the original mermaid trio was going to be separated once again.

"I know. It feels that way to me too." Emma said.

"I'm sorry guys, but we have to leave now if we are going to catch our flight." Emma sighed.

Cleo embraced Emma, and struggled not to cry over her friends departure.

The rest of the group said their goodbye's, and then Emma left, leaving the remaining friends with a feeling of confusion and sadness.

It was awkward to be sitting in front of your ex-boyfriend and your worst enemy in your most vulnerable state. There was nothing to be done about it though, Bella simply had to wait for the water to fully dry.

The trio sat in silence, but each of them had something they wanted to say.

Will thought about apologizing. He has moments of idiocy, but this time it went too far. He cared for Bella still but it seemed like there was nothing he could say that would make it right. He had truly messed everything up.

Sophie felt smug with herself. This was what she wanted. She hated Bella from the first time she laid eyes on her and now she had her revenge.

Right?

At the back of her mind, she had doubts, but she would never voice them. If she thought too hard about what she was doing, her whole world would come crashing down. She would have to rethink every action she has ever taken, question every decision she has made.

_You hate Bella, and so you will bring her down. _

She repeated that thought to herself, trying to make it stick. But

for some reason, it didn't have the same ring that it used to. Sophie felt like she was on the edge of a deep abyss, barely holding on to the sides.

Inevitably, she would fall.

Bella was holding on to a deep anger, a passionate fury that was barely contained within the oh-so-sweet facade that was Bella. She was angry at Will, for betraying her. But she was also angry at herself.

How had she not seen that she was letting Will walk all over her while they were together? He forced her to show her true self to him, he forced her to get in that swimming pool, and he forced her to go on swims with him. She was furious that she hadn't even noticed how controlling he truly was.

Bella wanted to lash out against him and call him a bunch of not very nice names, but she knew that now was neither the time nor place for that.

Obviously, Bella held a grudge against Sophie for going public with her secret. But once again, it came back to feeling upset with herself. She didn't have to be Sophie's lap-dog, her friends weren't asking her to do this for them.

Bella was sick of being the kind and sweet person that was oh-so-dependable. She was tired of being weak and vulnerable.

She wanted to break away so badly, but she felt trapped. Not by Will, Sophie, or even her friends, but by herself. If she chose to breakaway, that would mean a new Bella. A whole new person that she wasn't sure she felt comfortable with quite yet.

She vowed that she would do it, though. Eventually. Eventually, the new Bella would come out. Stronger and tougher than ever before.

****AN: Sorry for Emma's abrupt departure, but as I was writing this I realized something.****

****I hate Emma.****

****Why in the world did I even bring her into my story in the first place? So, I got rid of her. I tried to make it at least somewhat realistic...****

****If you are deeply saddened by Emma's disappearance, then I am sorry but it is my story and I can do whatever I want to. So there. No flames about good-bye Emma, please.****

End
file.